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ENGLISH POETS  
AND THE  
NATIONAL IDEAL

FOUR LECTURES

BY

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## PREFACE

THE four lectures which comprise this volume were delivered during the winter before a familiar audience. They make no pretension to scholarship, and were not written with a view to publication. But in the present crisis the humblest citizen is anxious to contribute, as best he can, to the service of his country; and the student of English literature can perhaps do no better than help to set in circulation those ideas and emotions which have stirred our greatest poets in periods of national stress, and made them the mouthpiece of the finest spirit of their times. What they wrote, each for his own age, has lost little of its value; for much as we need to-day all the physical and material strength that we can command, we need still more ideas and inspiration; and our patriotism will be both wiser and more devoted if we learn to draw upon the immense spiritual resources of our poetry, which are not the least glorious nor the least precious part of our heritage as Englishmen. It is in the hope that these lectures, despite their obvious limitations, may awaken a few readers to a fuller sense of that heritage and all that it implies, that I have decided to publish them.

To my audiences in the University and City of Birmingham, who for the past six years have listened to me with courteous and sympathetic attention, they are gratefully dedicated.

E. DE SÉLINCOURT.

BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY,  
*March 1915.*





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# I

## SHAKESPEARE

A TIME like the present, when we are in the throes of a great national crisis, affecting the lives of the most callous and indifferent of us, affords a clear test of the value that we really attach to literature, and, in particular, to poetry, the highest form of literature. Do we lay it aside as a pleasant pastime suitable enough for less hustling days but remote from our present practical needs and purposes, or do we turn to it with a keener spiritual hunger, feeling that it can give us not merely a *pastime*, but in the true sense *recreation*? Are we content to exist from day to day upon scant official communications and upon much verbose and highly-coloured unofficial rumour, or do we feel that we have all the greater need to keep alive within us the love of what is more permanent both in its interest and its inherent value? The answer which each one of us is able to give to questions of this nature determines our real attitude to literature and the place it fills in our whole mental and spiritual constitution. We all run the danger of a certain morbidity of mind, of falling victims to a kind of obsession by which we are not only sacrificing the future to the present, but even injuring our own value in the present that we seek to serve; and the more successfully we can preserve the balance of our normal selves and keep alive all our interests, and especially the higher ones, the better we shall be able to perform both our ordinary and our extraordinary duties. It might be urged that for this purpose the remoter the

theme from actual life, the more complete will be its benefit to us. And yet, perhaps, even better than the momentary abstraction from our own special problems is the transmuting of them into something higher than ourselves, so that we see them with the eyes of greater and more thoughtful men. There is a common fallacy abroad that the poet has nothing to say to us in actual emergencies, and that the practical man is only hampered by listening to the idealist. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is only the minor poet who is unpractical, only the third-rate man of affairs who is not inspired by a constant reference to the ideal. The poet, let us remember, is 'a man speaking to men ; but a man endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature and a more comprehensive soul than the common man'.<sup>1</sup> What he has to say to us when his soul is stirred by that common and wellnigh universal sentiment of patriotism can hardly fail to be of value to us. In this and the following lectures, therefore, I shall try to put before you the attitude taken up by some of our greatest poets to the peculiar aspects of the national problem by which they were confronted, and at the same time to suggest the growth in the nation of a fuller comprehension of its destiny. In each of them is found a deep love of country and a passionate pride in her achievements ; each of them has expressed the finest spirit of his age ; but the idea of patriotism has developed with the progress of civilization, so that only within the last century, perhaps, has its full significance been realized.

Shakespeare lived in an intensely patriotic age. The country, which had long been torn by internal dissensions and violent religious quarrels, had awakened to a con-

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth : Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800.

sciousness of her own greatness and of the place that she was to take in the world. The repulse of the Spanish Armada marks the period when the national spirit rose to its highest point. Internally the wealth and prosperity of the people had rapidly increased, and the policy of expansion had begun which seemed to set no limits to the future greatness of the realm. At the same time men became more and more conscious of their own individual power, though they saw that power inevitably bound up with the prosperity of their fatherland. No man, however egotistic, could avoid being a patriot, for in his country he saw himself writ large. It was only natural that there should be a sudden awakening of interest in past history. Chronicles were written and were eagerly read. Little discrimination, indeed, was shown between fact and legend. It was not a critical age ; and everywhere material was sought which could illustrate the growth and development of the country to its present glory. As would be expected, no men felt this enthusiasm more keenly than the dramatists and poets, and of the dramatists and poets none more than Shakespeare. A critic has noted that ' from the year of the Armada down to the end of Elizabeth's reign more than a fifth of all the plays whose titles have survived took their subjects from English history. Thirteen of Shakespeare's (more than a third of the whole) are of this sort '. In some of them, such as *King Lear* and *Cymbeline*, though the theme was accepted by his contemporaries as veritable record of fact, the history was to Shakespeare of but secondary importance ; but the reigns of more authentic monarchs, from John to Henry VIII, he presents in the main with careful regard to contemporary historical opinion. In many other plays, where the motive is far enough removed from matters of state concern,

Shakespeare contrives to give his work a political or national setting. He was profoundly impressed, in a way that the modern artist is seldom impressed, with the essential relation of the individual to that larger society which is called a nation; and with the influence which a man's feelings towards the community have upon his whole life and character. Not only did Shakespeare first practise the art of tragedy in subjects of clear national moment, but he never treated a tragic theme, hardly ever a tragi-comic one, without giving it a definitely historical or quasi-historic background. Even the *Comedy of Errors*, which he borrows from Plautus, he sets in a background of international feud, and thus adds weight and dignity to a plot which in the Latin was pure farce. This background is not perfunctorily sketched in merely to make the scene effective: it exercises in each case a distinct function, and without it the conception of the play would be incomplete. In each case the hero's relation with his state intensifies or complicates the situation. In *Romeo and Juliet* it is the condition of the tragedy; in *Hamlet* and in *Othello* it bears directly upon it; in the Roman tragedies the relation is self-evident. It was, indeed, impossible for Shakespeare, living when he did, to be blind to the fact that the sphere of the individual is not bound within the narrow confines of the circle of intimate friends and enemies, but that there are larger issues at stake, and in the conflict of the two lies the germ of many a dramatic situation in life. With the growth in the size of the state, in which less active demand of service has fallen on the individual, and in which, as the individual has become less important to the state, the state has become less important to the individual, this relationship has to a great extent fallen out of notice; and that art which reflects the life of

to-day gives little prominence to it. Surely our modern art has been the loser by this change—the loser in dignity, as also, in a sense, in universality. Our present crisis is too new to have as yet affected our national literature. But in so far as at no period since the Elizabethan age has the consciousness of that relationship been brought home to us so fully as it is to-day, may we look for some renaissance of it in the near future. In the meantime we turn to Shakespeare for its clearest expression.

The modern democrat, perhaps, will often find it in a form which at first sight is distasteful to him. Shakespeare's whole reading of history is aristocratic. He concentrates the history of the nation in the doings of its leaders; the people are of small account, and seldom appear upon the scene except to display their fickleness, their stupidity, or their brutality. Hence we find radicals like Hazlitt turning from Shakespeare's historical dramas in disgust at what he concludes to be their anti-popular bias, and Walt Whitman, the mouthpiece of modern democracy, speaking of Shakespeare as the poet of a feudalism that has passed away, and with it the lessons that Shakespeare had to teach us. Statements of this kind show merely a neglect of historical fact and a lack of historical imagination. In the time at which Shakespeare wrote, no other presentation of fact would have been possible. The people had not yet emerged into political existence, and to present them as other than they were would not only have been a piece of political prescience which can hardly be expected even of the greatest of artists, it would have been a falsification of the truth. Shakespeare was essentially a creature of the time, and he read history with the eyes of his time. He had doubtless a fuller vision and a clearer, but it was his own time that he interpreted and

not ours. And we ought to have enough intelligence to allow us to translate his vision into terms of our own life. The anti-democratic conception of national life, characteristic of the whole Elizabethan era, corresponds, indeed, far more closely to the Germany than to the England of to-day; and there can be no doubt that this accounts in some measure for the popularity of Shakespeare among Germans. They see in his *Politik* something that corresponds with their present ideal of government, which we regard as now three centuries out of date. And so their poet Hauptmann roundly asserts that Shakespeare was in truth a German; and a performance of the *Winter's Tale* at Leipzig, in October last, was preceded by a Prologue specially written for the occasion by Ernst Hardt, of which the concluding lines, as translated by *The Times*, ran thus :

Now this same Shakespeare hath commanded me  
 In solemn earnest to declare you this :  
 Ye unto him have been until to-day  
 His second home ; his first and native home  
 Was England ; but this England of the present  
 Is so contrarious in her acts and feelings,  
 Yea, so abhorr'd of his pure majesty,  
 That he doth find himself quite homeless there.  
 A fugitive he seeks his second home,  
 This Germany, that loves him most of all ;  
 To whom before all others he gives thanks  
 And says : Thou wonderful and noble land,  
 Remain thou Shakespeare's one and only home,  
 So that he wanders not, uncomprehended,  
 Without a shelter in the barren world.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I have not seen the original of the poem, but though the translation may not have done full justice to its beauty of style, it is doubtless accurate enough. According to the *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten*, in which the poem appeared, the play produced was *A Winter's Tale*, but as we are informed that it was 'spoken by the fool in attendance upon Olivia', the drama may possibly have been *Twelfth Night*.



Poor Shakespeare ! If you want to crystallize the pathetic situation in a phrase you might call it ' Shakespeare interned ' or ' Germany the snapper-up of unconsidered trifles '. It will be my attempt to show both to the German Autolycus and to the English democrat that they lack imagination ; that we in England, despite the obvious difference in our national and political constitution from that of the Elizabethan age, have still a use for Shakespeare ; and that his capture by the enemy has as yet no better authority than an official wireless communication from Berlin.

Shakespeare was no bigoted, unreasoning supporter of aristocracies. In *All's Well that Ends Well* he can even justify the heroism of humble birth against the arrogance of a noble blood that belies itself, uttering the truly democratic sentiment :

From lowest place when virtuous things proceed,  
The place is dignified by the doer's deed :  
Where great additions swell's, and virtue none,  
It is a dropsied honour. . . . Honours thrive  
When rather from our acts we them derive  
Than our foregoers.<sup>1</sup>

Nobility to him is in the last resort a matter of character rather than of descent. He insists, it is true, upon obedience of word and deed to prescribed authority, and that authority in his world was, as a matter of fact, vested in kings and princes ; but none the less his root-principle is that of *noblesse oblige*. He believes that the great are surrounded by great temptations, but they are only great when they surmount those temptations ; and when they fall from their duty he is deeply impressed by the tragic result. This is the tragedy of most of Shakespeare's English kings, this is the tragedy of Macbeth and of

<sup>1</sup> *All's Well that Ends Well*, II. iii. 132-44.

Coriolanus. A similar study, showing at the same time the dangers which a state may run both from those in authority and those under it is given us in *Measure for Measure*. Therein Angelo, left in charge of the dukedom in the absence of his master Vincentio, falls a victim to that very vice which he most desired to root out of the state, and in order to shield himself he grossly perverts the cause of justice and betrays the trust that has been reposed in him. Side by side with this motive, as though to correct the impression of the general unfitness of rulers for the offices to which they are called, we have the continued and reiterated defence of Vincentio against malicious charges which are entirely false. And at the end of the play, while Angelo, deeply penitent, is forgiven his treachery, the one sin unpardoned is that of slandering a prince. This is not because Shakespeare thinks that a ruler is above criticism and is responsible to God alone. Far from it. His most fervent patriot, old John of Gaunt, is not afraid to denounce the crimes of King Richard to his face. But such criticisms must be based upon knowledge of the facts and not upon rumour or conjecture. Of all unpatriotic crimes the baseless attack upon those in authority is to him the worst and the most dangerous. Surely this cannot be put down to mere aristocratic bias. It is a profound criticism of the greatest peril to a state—a peril which grows in proportion to the power of the people over the policy of their country and the facilities by which rumours may be spread and opinion moulded. It is greater far to-day than ever in the Elizabethan age. For if the ruler is elected by the people he needs their loyal support as fully as if he were an autocrat. Many a modern statesman could re-echo with conviction the words of Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure*:

O place and greatness ! millions of false eyes  
Are stuck upon thee : volumes of report  
Run with these false and most contrarious quests  
Upon thy doings : thousand escapes of wit  
Make thee the father of their idle dream,  
And rack thee in their fancies !<sup>1</sup>

Surely if we have anything of historic imagination, we can easily translate this into modern terms. If to-day absolute authority has, with us at least, been superseded by divided responsibility, and the people now occupy, in varying degrees, the position once held by the autocrat, the problem of the state is altered in form but not in substance. The problem was simpler then, but it was the same problem ; and from Shakespeare's delineation of those in authority in their strength and their weakness, their virtues and their vices, the modern reader can see his own image. He can see himself in his relation to the state, both as an individual and as a member of a corporate class. In a democratic country of thirty-six millions it may seem infinitely unimportant what one individual does or thinks as compared with what in an autocracy one man, and that the irresponsible ruler, does or thinks ; yet the fate of the democratic country depends clearly enough upon the collective effect of the views and character of each one of her individual citizens ; and whilst there is here less danger of a selfish policy, through the obvious difficulty of combination for such an end, and through the necessary conflict of interests, there is more danger of apathy, through each man thinking that these things are not his concern. To Shakespeare, national affairs were the concern of all those whom he chooses to represent ; and if we would justify our democracy on national grounds we can only do so, not by saying that

<sup>1</sup> *Measure for Measure*, IV. i. 61-6.

Shakespeare has nothing to teach us, but by applying to ourselves and our position in the state the lessons that he writes large in the characters and fates of his kings and statesmen.

In this spirit we may interpret the character of Richard II, whose folly and crimes bring tragic suffering both upon himself and upon his country. In prosperity Richard is entirely self-indulgent, thoughtless of the interests of others, insolent when he is crossed, blinded to all sense of justice by the promptings of his own desires. His ears are ever open to those who flatter his vanity and feed his foolish sense of security; so that he remains ignorant of the extent to which his own policy is sapping the vitality of his country. Self-indulgence has made him weak, and his occasional bursts of capricious tyranny only reveal his ineffectiveness and injustice. Of course he loves his country, for his country provides him with all the good things that he possesses, the pleasure and luxury which make up his life; but this love is based not upon what he can do for England, but upon what England can do for him. He can express it beautifully, because he is an educated man, with a taste for poetic phrases; but it is entirely sentimental, and his expression of it contains no faintest suggestion that he recognizes any duty or sacrifice from him. Thus, on his return from Ireland, he says:

I weep for joy  
To stand upon my kingdom once again.  
Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand;

. . . . .  
As a long-parted mother with her child  
Plays fondly with her tears and smiles in meeting,  
So weeping, smiling, greet I thee, my earth,  
And do thee favour with my royal hands.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Richard II*, III. ii. 4-11.

The relation in which he should stand to his country is shown in this speech to be entirely reversed. Instead of regarding himself as the son of England, England is his child and plaything. And, as is natural to one who has been lulled into a sense of security by the comforts and the pleasures that have fallen to his lot in the past, he is confident that he is in some mysterious way the favoured protégé of Heaven. God is certainly on his side. For every man that may oppose him

God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay  
A glorious angel: then, if angels fight,  
Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the right.<sup>1</sup>

He has apparently never heard that wise saw which runs, 'God helps those that help themselves.' He has been so dilatory that he reaches England to find that the army of Welshmen that long awaited his arrival has in despair deserted to the enemy; and he has to fall back upon the somewhat problematical support of the troop of heavenly angels. And apparently his faith in them is not equal to the occasion; for from utterly unfounded hopes he falls at once into unmanly, unnecessary despair. He meets disaster half-way, and in panic gives up his cause long before it is really lost. When he is finally beaten, he wins some affection from us, partly from our sense of pity, partly because there is always something charmingly picturesque about his personality; and he can even show courage when he has to face death, i. e. when courage has no practical but only a theatrical value. But from first to last he is a living type of the man whose attitude to the larger duties to his country has been warped and perverted by a selfish love of ease, by a total ignorance of that duty which the very existence

<sup>1</sup> Ib. 60-2.

of a community demands from all its sons. The warning of Richard's fall need not be lost to us to-day, because Richard is a king, and we are a self-governed people. And what the play has to teach us is by no means confined to the study of its pathetic hero. Something can be learnt from most of the leading characters, as well in themselves as in their relation with the whole. Richard was not, in the obvious sense, a monarch surrounded by self-seeking traitors. On the contrary, the men whose lives acted and re-acted upon his were all in a way intense patriots. They were imbued with a genuine love of their native land, and they speak of it in language not only eloquent but intensely and entirely sincere. This is true not only of the lovely eulogy of England that fell from the dying lips of Gaunt :

This other Eden, demi-paradise,  
 This fortress built by Nature for herself  
 Against infection and the hand of war,  
 This happy breed of men, this little world,  
 This precious stone set in the silver sea,  
 Which serves it in the office of a wall,  
 Or as a moat defensive to a house,  
 Against the envy of less happier lands,  
 This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.<sup>1</sup>

But other nobles speak words almost as memorable and even more touching in their devotion. Thus the passionate regret of banished Mowbray at the thought that from henceforth he will neither hear nor speak the language of his country, voices an emotion which strikes deep into the hearts of all of us who have learnt to love our beautiful English tongue :

My native English, now I must forego;  
 And now my tongue's use is to me no more  
 Than an unstrung viol or a harp.

. . . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Richard II*, II, i. 42-50.



What is thy sentence then but speechless death,  
Which robs my tongue from breathing native breath ? <sup>1</sup>

To depart from England is for Mowbray 'to dwell in solemn shades of endless night'. So Bolingbroke, going into a lighter punishment, speaks words that will find an echo within us, if we are called to leave our country :

Then, England's ground, farewell ; sweet soil, adieu :  
My mother, and my nurse, that bears me yet !  
Where'er I wander, boast of this I can,  
Though banish'd, yet a true-born Englishman.<sup>2</sup>

This is an emotion felt equally by those who are in voluntary banishment, as many of our colonists are proving to-day. This same spirit of patriotic love of country is found in all the nobles, in York, in Northumberland, in the Bishop of Carlisle. They are patriots all, and they are all ready with genuine and sincere conviction—to denounce one another as traitors. They are anxious to prove their loyalty in any way but just the one way needful—to be at peace with one another. And so we are forced to the position that even 'patriotism where there is no moral order means civil strife',<sup>3</sup> and civil strife means ruin. The tragedy gathers, it has been said, 'not only in the painful psychology of Richard, but in the ominous wrangling scenes between Bolingbroke and Mowbray and their exultation at the prospect of battle, in Gaunt's reproaches, in the secret conversations of the nobles, in the queen's nameless woe, and the misery and confusion of poor old fumbling York ; in the Welsh captain's omens, and Salisbury's comment ; in the disorderly scene at Westminster Hall, and the ineffectual protests of Carlisle.'<sup>3</sup>

One does not need a keen political acumen to interpret

<sup>1</sup> Ib. i. iii. 160-73.

<sup>2</sup> Ib. 306-9.

<sup>3</sup> Introduction to *Richard II*, by G. S. Gordon (Clarendon Press).

all this. These dangers are incident to any type of government which has not the confidence of those it professes to govern, and the power to control them.

Shakespeare was no subtle political theorist. He looked on the present and the past of his country with the eyes of an intelligent Elizabethan patriot. His audience was a popular one; his desire was to put before them what seemed to him the chief basis of his country's greatness and to emphasize the broad principles on which it rested. And the first lesson that he read in past history was the imperative need for national unity. The house divided against itself cannot stand. He saw that in the reigns of those kings in whose fates he traced the evolution of his country, private dissensions had been a greater danger than enemies from without. Her foes had always been those of her own household. In only one reign that he had reviewed was England free from wars or rebellions at home; in only one play does he show the true spirit of England in harmony with the sovereign power of the realm, so that the king could in any true sense be called the representative of the national spirit, and that one was Henry V. Of the others it has often been pointed out that the hero is not the king who gives the play its title, but England; and that the reigning monarch typifies some weakness or vice in the nation to which its present weakness is in part to be attributed. In Richard II, as we have seen, it is the love of pleasure. In Richard III it is unscrupulous personal ambition; in King John it is treachery and the cowardly pursuit of what seems a momentary advantage as against set principle; in Henry IV, where the national wreck is less complete, it is a diplomacy which, joined as it is to great administrative ability and



efficiency, succeeds in rescuing the state from a hopeless chaos, yet is tainted with an alloy of personal selfishness which renders its success only ephemeral. All these vices are most dangerous when they are concentrated in one autocratic monarch, but they cannot flourish among a democratic people with impunity. All these things breed restlessness and dissension. Only in so far as they are subdued is the nation strong. Shakespeare's attitude to the whole problem is summed up in the words with which he closes his tragedy of *King John*:

This England never did, nor never shall,  
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,  
But when it first did help to wound itself.  
Now these her princes are come home again,  
Come the three corners of the world in arms,  
And we shall shock them. Nought shall make us rue,  
If England to itself do rest but true.

But this unity of which Shakespeare conceives does not merely lie in the absence of active civil strife. The state is to him a complicated human machine, in which each separate part contributes its quota to the general efficiency, and it may at any time be thrown out of gear by the failure of one part to perform its allotted function. In two notable passages Shakespeare develops this conception. The first is from *Henry V*:

For government, though high and low and lower,  
Put into parts, doth keep in one consent,  
Congreeing in a full and natural close,  
Like music.

Therefore doth heaven divide  
The state of man in divers functions,  
Setting endeavour in continual motion;  
To which is fixed, as an aim or butt,  
Obedience: for so work the honey-bees,  
Creatures that by a rule in nature teach  
The act of order to a peopled kingdom

And after an elaborate comparison of the division of labour in the beehive to that which obtains in an ordered commonwealth, he draws the moral that

As many fresh streams meet in one salt sea ;  
 As many lines close in the dial's centre ;  
 So may a thousand actions, once afoot,  
 End in one purpose, and be all well borne  
 Without defeat.<sup>1</sup>

The second passage, rather more obscurely written, but even fuller of meaning and of suggestion, is Ulysses' speech to the disorganized leaders of Greece on the necessity of observing what he terms 'degree' :

The specialty of rule<sup>2</sup> hath been neglected :  
 And look, how many Grecian tents do stand  
 Hollow upon this plain, so many hollow factions  
 When that the general is not like the hive  
 To whom the foragers shall all repair,  
 What honey is expected ? Degree being vizarded,  
 The unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask.  
 The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre  
 Observe degree, priority, and place,  
 Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,  
 Office, and custom, in all line of order :  
 And therefore is the glorious planet Sol  
 In noble eminence enthron'd and spher'd  
 Amidst the other ; whose med'cinable eye  
 Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil,  
 And posts, like the commandment of a king,  
 Sans check, to good and bad : but when the planets  
 In evil mixture to disorder wander,  
 What plagues, and what portents, what mutiny,  
 What raging of the sea, shaking of earth,  
 Commotion in the winds, frights, changes, horrors,  
 Divert and crack, rend and deracinate  
 The unity and married calm of states  
 Quite from their fixure ! O ! when degree is shak'd,  
 Which is the ladder to all high designs,

<sup>1</sup> *Henry V*, I. ii. 180-9, 209-13.

<sup>2</sup> *The specialty of rule*, i.e. the particular rights of supreme authority.

The enterprise is sick. How could communities,  
Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,  
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,  
The primogenitive and due of birth,  
Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,  
But by degree, stand in authentic place ?  
Take but degree away, untune that string,  
And, hark ! what discord follows ; each thing meets  
In mere oppugnancy : the bounded waters  
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,  
And make a sop of all this solid globe :  
Strength should be lord of imbecility,  
And the rude son should strike his father dead :  
Force should be right ; or rather, right and wrong—  
Between whose endless jar justice resides—  
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.  
Then every thing includes itself in power,  
Power into will, will into appetite ;  
And appetite, a universal wolf,  
So doubly seconded with will and power,  
Must make perforce a universal prey,  
And last eat up himself.<sup>1</sup>

These two passages have just as much value for us as they had for the Elizabethan audience for whom they were written. They are indeed truer under a free state than under an autocracy ; for the less compulsion, the more the individual responsibility. When a man chooses for himself the part that he will take in the national organization, the more incumbent on him is it to fulfil that part to the utmost ; where he has a voice in the selection of those who represent supreme authority, it is all the more incumbent on him to obey loyally. Where ' the specialty of rule ' has been neglected, the result can only be disaster. In a state like the Elizabethan, or like any modern military autocracy, this danger is far less real ; for the people are readier, as it were by

<sup>1</sup> *Troilus and Cressida*, I. iii. 78-124.

instinct, to do what they are told, and are not accustomed to think for themselves. But liberty has its price, like all else that is worth the having; and that price is greater risk to the state and greater responsibility to the individual. Those in supreme authority can only act successfully when the 'degree' is observed. So much for the relation of different degrees in the state one to another.

On the principles that should govern the corporate action of the state and guide its administration, Shakespeare is equally clear and decisive. That policy, he holds, can only have permanent success which is strictly just, and observes the same laws of conduct as should actuate private individuals. Might must never be mistaken for right. The breach of moral laws, by a ruler acting in the interests of community or a party, meets with the same inexorable nemesis as if he were acting solely for himself. The thirst for power, the promptings of ambition, even of an honourable ambition, must be subordinate to a sense of right. The sequence of plays from *Richard II* to *Henry V* is closely knit together in the working out of this idea. Richard was quite unfit to rule, he betrayed his trust, and inevitable retribution overtook him. Yet Bolingbroke, though the minister of divine punishment, was not justified in his usurpation. He had no right to the throne. His calm and statesmanlike intellect gave him indeed an easy conquest over Richard; but whilst Shakespeare admires his efficiency, he spares no pains in censuring his ambition. He is the crafty politician whose scheming can bring no permanent good either to himself or to his country. Henry has no joy in what he has won, and no peace in his possession of it. He is haunted throughout his life with the memory of the sin by which he compassed his

end; he is in constant fear of rebellion, and lives on in gloomy anticipation that all that he has built up will crumble into ruin as soon as his watchful eye is taken from it. His bitter words as he reflects on the issue of his ceaseless efforts to establish a stable rule, denote with a fatal clearness the utter world-weariness of a disillusioned man :

O God ! that one might read the book of fate,  
 And see the revolutions of the times  
 Make mountains level, and the continent,—  
 Weary of solid firmness,—melt itself  
 Into the sea ! and other times, to see  
 The beachy girdle of the ocean  
 Too wide for Neptune's hips ; how chances mock,  
 And changes fill the cup of alteration  
 With divers liquors ! O ! if this were seen,  
 The happiest youth, viewing his progress through,  
 What perils past, what crosses to ensue,  
 Would shut the book, and sit him down and die.<sup>1</sup>

Allegiance that is won without justice and held without willingness is never secure, whether the allegiance be of the individual, the party, or the nation. For suspicion breeds suspicion, scheming begets scheming, and force begets force. Honesty is to Shakespeare the only policy that can be successful in the long run. That country alone can prosper whose destinies are guided and controlled by a government that combines strength and decision of purpose with integrity and justice.

Such an ideal he presents to us in his portrait of Henry V, and the character, well known as it is, is worth our dwelling upon. Henry has indeed some personal qualities that are not of the finest, and, as a man, it is clear enough that he was not among Shakespeare's favourite creations ; but, as a ruler, Shakespeare has little but praise for him, and he presents him to us as a model of a noble practical success.

<sup>1</sup> 2 *Henry IV*, III. i. 45-56.

His most characteristic virtues are sincerity, simplicity, and a devotion to his country which is totally devoid of self-seeking. He does not hold himself aloof from his people on a pedestal: he shares their privations, and moves among them in the spirit of true comradeship. For the shifty diplomacy of his father, the 'crafty politician Bolingbroke', he will substitute a clear straightforward honesty which, as he himself admits, even oversteps the bounds of reasonable prudence. For example, when the French herald urges his surrender before the battle of Agincourt, his reply is such as could only increase the confidence of his foe:

to say the sooth,—  
 Though 'tis no wisdom to confess so much  
 Unto an enemy of craft and vantage,—  
 My people are with sickness much enfeebled,  
 My numbers lessen'd, and those few I have  
 Almost no better than so many French:

. . . . .  
 Go therefore, tell thy master here I am:  
 My ransom is this frail and worthless trunk,  
 My army but a weak and sickly guard;  
 Yet, God before, tell him we will come on,  
 Though France himself and such another neighbour  
 Stand in our way.

. . . . .  
 The sum of all our answer is but this:  
 We would not seek a battle, as we are;  
 Nor, as we are, we say we will not shun it:  
 So tell your master.<sup>1</sup>

This was not a very prudent announcement; but it was at least honest. But most noticeable, perhaps, is the emphasis which Shakespeare lays throughout upon the deeply religious strain in Henry's character. Like Richard II he regards himself as God's deputy on earth;

<sup>1</sup> *Henry V*, III. vi. 154-78.



but that belief, instead of leading him to behave like an irresponsible and capricious tyrant, who is certain of God's protection, whatever he does or leaves undone, only impresses on Henry a more lively sense of his obligations, and a more scrupulous interpretation of his duty. It is not enough for him to consider what is expedient : he must know what is right. He realizes the awful responsibility resting upon those who make war, and will not set out for France until he is satisfied that his cause is just. On this vital question he appeals to the highest authority he knows, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and begs him justly and religiously to unfold the truth :

And God forbid, my dear and faithful lord,  
That you should fashion, wrest, or bow your reading,  
Or nicely charge your understanding soul  
With opening titles miscreate, whose right  
Suits not in native colours with the truth ;  
For God doth know how many now in health  
Shall drop their blood in approbation  
Of what your reverence shall incite us to.  
Therefore take heed how you impawn our person,  
How you awake our sleeping sword of war :  
We charge you, in the name of God, take heed ;  
For never two such kingdoms did contend  
Without much fall of blood ; whose guiltless drops  
Are every one a woe, a sore complaint,  
'Gainst him whose wrongs give edge unto the swords  
That make such waste in brief mortality.  
Under this conjuration speak, my lord,  
And we will hear, note, and believe in heart,  
That what you speak is in your conscience wash'd  
As pure as sin with baptism.<sup>1</sup>

It is only when the archbishop, to Henry an unimpeachable authority in such matters, has replied, 'The sin upon my head, dread sovereign,' and he has been urged

<sup>1</sup> Ib. I. ii. 13-32.

to win what is his lawful right, that he undertakes the expedition. To assume, as Hazlitt does, that Henry is an insincere hypocrite, is to read into the situation modern conceptions of history of which Shakespeare never dreamed, and to belie his whole view of the character. However flimsy Henry's claim to France may in fact have been, it is clear that Shakespeare had no doubts himself upon that score, and that he conceives of Henry as having none either. But the conviction that his cause is just does not make Henry self-righteous, nor blind his eyes to the fact that his country had not always been in the right. He does not bolster himself up with an inflated sense of his own merits. There is a type of patriotism current, if patriotism it can be called, that consists in self-glorification, and holds as its inalienable creed that England can do no wrong. It would present our past history as an uninterrupted sequence of noble and self-sacrificing acts pursued in the interests of the world at large. We had an example of it some months ago in the action of the Education Committee of a County Council which severely criticized a pamphlet written by an historian of distinction to explain to the children the causes of the present war. The pamphlet contained a sentence to the effect that in the past England's wars had not all of them been just. Such a statement, it was urged, was most ill-advised and would undermine the patriotism of the children. And such is the common attitude of a popular and irresponsible press. How few of us are prepared to accept the truth, even the truth that we know. That was not Henry's attitude. The greater his need the more conscious he was of his own unworthiness, and he is ready to do all that his religion prompts him to show his repentance and humiliation.



Not to-day, O Lord!

O! not to-day, think not upon the fault  
 My father made in compassing the crown.  
 I Richard's body have interred anew;  
 And on it have bestow'd more contrite tears  
 Than from it issu'd forced drops of blood.

. . . . .

More will I do ;

Though all that I can do is nothing worth,  
 Since that my penitence comes after all,  
 Imploring pardon.<sup>1</sup>

In this spirit he engages in the conflict. As a consequence he is not weakened in the energy which he throws into his cause, but putting his whole might into it he is yet humble. He disdains to play the insolent braggart. In this he is strongly contrasted with his enemies, who spend the day before the battle in recounting the heroic exploits that they are about to achieve. Once, indeed, Henry is betrayed into the typically jingo assertion that 'upon one pair of English legs did march three Frenchmen', but he has the grace to be ashamed of himself even as he says it, and to ask forgiveness for his idle boast. And after the victory is won, when some swagger would perhaps have been excusable, he sternly represses the temptation both in himself and in his troops :

Come, go we in procession to the village:  
 And be it death proclaimed through our host  
 To boast of this or take the praise from God  
 Which is his only.

This is rather too much for his brave little Welsh captain, who bursts out with the question :

Is it not lawful, an please your majesty, to tell how many is killed ?

<sup>1</sup> *Henry V*, iv. i. 312-25.

And Henry replies, with a smile :

Yes, captain ; but with this acknowledgment,  
That God fought for us.

*Fluellen.* Yes, my conscience, he did us great good.<sup>1</sup>

And when the victorious army reach London, and the lords desire that Henry should have his bruised helmet and his bended sword borne before him through the city,

he forbids it,  
Being free from vainness and self-glorious pride ;  
Giving full trophy, signal and ostent,  
Quite from himself, to God.<sup>2</sup>

Such is Shakespeare's conception of the qualities of the ideal ruler, whose virtues should be honoured and imitated by his subjects, each in his degree. There can be little doubt that when he drew the portrait his eye was firmly fixed in reprobation upon another ideal current at his time, which, though generally but loosely denounced by his contemporaries, was exercising an indubitable influence upon statesmen and politicians. That policy was Machiavellianism. Machiavelli's *Prince* had been the text-book of Thomas Cromwell, the powerful adviser of Henry VIII ; its precepts were in a measure followed by both Cecil and Leicester ; much of its teaching was advocated later by Lord Bacon. And Shakespeare's delineation of Henry V becomes more significant when we turn to the pages of Machiavelli and see the political and national teaching to which Henry is, as it were, the counterblast. The prime object with which Machiavelli wrote was to effect the unification of Italy. Hence his idea of the state is confined to its military and political aspects ; he ignores culture, private comfort and advantage, and all religious

<sup>1</sup> *Henry V*, iv. viii. 118-26.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.*, Chorus to v. 19-22.

considerations. The ideal state to which he looked for guidance was the ancient republic of Rome, founded on the principles dictated by the struggle for existence against neighbouring states and the gradual building up of a huge and powerful empire. This, he urged, could only be done by a strict recognition of the essentially weak and self-interested character of individuals and other states. This point of view led Machiavelli to maintain certain propositions, which exercised a fascination over his Elizabethan readers even while they execrated their author, and particularly over those who were themselves empire-builders. The first of these is the doctrine that the end justifies the means ; the second that Christianity spells political and national ruin. Obviously, he contended, Christianity does not encourage that idea of worldly glory which is essential to the welfare, nay, the existence of a state, whilst Paganism upholds worldly glory as admirable. Consequently under Christianity the religious are at a disadvantage in all contests with the irreligious, and the world must fall into the hands of the wicked. The true Christian believes that his kingdom is not of this world ; how, then, can he govern it successfully? He is necessarily unfitted to cope with practical matters, whilst if he is a hypocrite he is merely trammelled by the obligation to profess what he does not believe in. But most of all did Machiavelli hate the Church of Rome. For the pope, by his desire for temporal rule, interfered with the spirit of nationality wherever he had authority, and in particular it was his power which prevented the accomplishment of Machiavelli's cherished dream, the dream of a united Italy. Now, urged Machiavelli, the governor who has these great objects in view must not be guided in his actions by the ordinary

moral code. He must love his country more than the safety of his own soul. He must be careless of the individual, and consider only the glory of the community. Consequently we find him telling us with care and exactitude, when the prince should break his word, when he should betray his servant, when he should throw over an ally he is pledged to support, and so on ; and particular emphasis is laid upon the use of fraud to achieve his ends, for 'it behoves the ruler to be a fox as well as a lion'. All this sounds horrible enough in cold blood, but no student of history could affirm that Machiavelli was introducing new ideas into statecraft. He was merely reducing to a science, and setting the seal of political philosophy upon methods which have always played a large part in the policy of kings and governments. Machiavelli was the Treitschke and Bernhardi of the Renaissance. The novelty consisted in the codification, as it were, and the justification of acts which, though often practised, had been regarded hitherto as morally indefensible. It was a clear statement of the superiority of the expedient over the right, a definite and cynical denial that the same laws of morality applied to the state and to the individual, an assertion of the principle that 'necessity knows no law'. Shakespeare's answer to this view of politics is found in all his delineations of political and national life. In states as in individuals he sees the workings of inevitable Nemesis, slow at times but always sure. There, too, he sees the sins of the fathers visited upon the children. There, too, he sees the redeeming power of virtue and of a consciousness of right. And the model that he holds up for Englishmen to follow is that of a king who loves justice and opposes crooked deceit with open plain-speaking ; who is not afraid to

face the truth when it is unpleasant, who has unflinching bravery in the face of whatever odds, who retains his cheerfulness in circumstances in which some depression might be excused, who is modest in success, and who is all these things because the basis of his character is a deep and sincere religious feeling. The character may seem in some respects a little out of date, and it is of course presented in the atmosphere and with the limitations of Elizabethan civilization; but none of us should, I think, be so modern that we can study it without some measure of profit. It is not subtle, it is not doctrinaire. Shakespeare was no professional political philosopher, he was a practical dramatist and a poet, whose first interest and study was human life and individual human character. But like all Elizabethans he was a patriot who loved to ponder over his nation's history, and this was his reading of history. It stirred his first audiences at the Globe Theatre to the highest pitch of enthusiasm. It has not lost its value to-day.

## II

### MILTON

MANY of us believe that the war in which we are now engaged is a war for freedom. We fight against a tyranny which, without provocation, has attempted to crush its weaker neighbour, and threatens us with a like enslavement; and we view the contest as a struggle between the ideals of military ambition, which recognizes no right but force, and of free and unimpeded national development. It is true that to Germany the war appears in something of the same light. She professes that she was forced into it from fear of foreign invasion, by a power whom she regards as more reactionary than herself, whilst she sees in the opposition of England merely the treacherous and jealous action of a foe who denies her free right to expand in the manner necessary for her national prosperity. But we contend that there is this great difference between our position and that of Germany; in that whereas we in England base our appeal for national freedom upon the freedom and the rights of individual citizens, for whose welfare the state exists—each of whom, according to his inclination and abilities, has a voice in the affairs of his country, in Germany there is no such thing as individual freedom in the national or political sense of the term. The individual is a mere cog in the wheel of a vast machine over whose direction and objective he has no control. The government is in the hands of a small and irresponsible body. Public opinion is not

allowed to develop naturally, by the spontaneous and healthy interchange of ideas, but is forced into those channels which suit the convenience of authority; and that authority, with a marvellous thoroughness and efficiency, directs the whole education of the people and controls the utterances of the press, to suit its own aims. The power of political thinking, like any other power, only grows by exercise. The German people have never exercised it. They have followed with a mute docility the guidance of their rulers, so that they have never acquired the faculty for forming independent judgements. Their future depends upon the extent to which, after this war, they can rouse themselves to throw off this yoke of intellectual bondage, and, gaining a fuller control of their own affairs, gain with it a true conception of national and individual liberty.

If in these matters we represent a higher ideal and a more advanced civilization, it is due to the influence upon both our practical organization and our intellectual life of those ideas which find their fullest and most inspiring expression in the writings of John Milton. The one passionate belief of Milton's life, which gives a unity to all his work, is the belief in the necessity of liberty as the essential preliminary of all development, both personal and national. To Milton the problem presented itself in the first place in the antagonism of the people to a foe within their own gates. He saw the liberty of the subject threatened both in his civil rights and in the rights of conscience; and he fought the battle of freedom against such tyranny ceaselessly throughout his life. It is beyond my purpose to go into the progress of that historic struggle. Those who are most ready to regard King Charles as a martyr owe much of what they



hold dearest in their heritage as Englishmen to the courage and to some, at least, of the principles of those whom they denounce as traitors and regicides : my business is not with facts, but with ideas ; and just as in the one sphere the dominating force was Cromwell, so in the other Milton stands out as the grandest advocate of ideal freedom, the man with the profoundest understanding of its true content and significance. But Milton did not speak only to his own age. His own age indeed understood him very imperfectly, and agreed with him still less. He was never in any real sense a party man. To call him a Puritan, in the ideal sense of the word, is true enough : to confuse him with the Puritan party because he approved of some of their tenets and found that some of his ideals were promoted by their government, is sheer ignorance. Like all great thinkers, Milton was far ahead of his time ; and he is ahead of the practice if not of the theory of our own. From his teaching and from his example we can still learn much both concerning the true meaning of individual liberty and concerning the relations of the free man to the state of which he is a member. It is obvious that here Milton has far more to give us than Shakespeare. The problems of modern life had not arisen in Elizabethan times, and Shakespeare's conception was necessarily limited by the conditions of his age. With Milton we have the beginnings of modern life ; and though in his attitude to democracy, as we understand the term, he is little in advance of Shakespeare, he enunciates in unmistakable accents the root-principles on which all true democracy must develop. Shakespeare accepts the established order and points out how best it may be supported and sustained. Milton stands for the right to criticize authority, to carry the



light of the individual reason and the individual conscience into every sphere of man's activity, public or private.

In Milton's eyes 'all men were born free', and no one has the right to interfere with that liberty which is their inalienable possession as human beings. 'The whole freedom of man consists either in spiritual or civil liberty.'<sup>1</sup> The first and most important is liberty of conscience, 'which ought to all men to be the most precious';<sup>2</sup> the second, which naturally follows from it, consists 'in the civil rights and advancements of every person according to his merit'.<sup>2</sup> This liberty of conscience demands the right of free utterance of his convictions. 'Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties' is the cry of his grandest prose pamphlet, the *Areopagitica*; and its leading ideas occur and recur through all his writings, whatever form of tyranny he happens at the moment to be denouncing. This liberty is necessary alike for the advance of knowledge, for the growth of independent judgement, and for the improvement of conduct. If we would attain the good and true we must know the base and the false. 'Good and evil we know in the field of the world grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil, in cunning resemblances hardly to be discerned. . . . As therefore the state of man now is, what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear, without the knowledge of evil? He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet

<sup>1</sup> *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, Milton's Prose Works (ed. Bohn), ii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *The Ready Way to establish a Free Commonwealth*, ib. ii. 133, 5.

abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true wayfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and seeks her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. . . . That which purifies us is by trial, and trial is by what is contrary.’<sup>1</sup> Milton has thus the essential spirit of the reformer—a passionate belief in the ideal and a readiness to risk something in its realization. And he is an example to all who work for social or political reform in that his faith in the inherent goodness of human nature, without which the very desire for reform is illogical folly, leads him to value a little positive good above the mere prevention of evil. ‘And were I the chooser, a dram of well-doing should be preferred before many times as much forcible hindrance of evil doing. For God sure esteems the growth and completing of one virtuous person more than the restraint of ten vicious.’<sup>2</sup> The advance to knowledge and truth is impossible without liberty; and freedom is of greater value than law, for where the good of laws is negative, that of liberty is positive. ‘If’, he says in another place,<sup>3</sup> ‘you permit the free discussion of truth without any hazard to the author, or any subjection to the caprice of an individual, which is the best way to make truth flourish and knowledge abound, the censure of the half-learned, the envy, the pusillanimity, or the prejudice which measures the discoveries of others, and, in short, every degree of wisdom, by the measure of its own capacity, will be prevented from doling out information to us according to their own arbitrary choice.

<sup>1</sup> *Areopagitica*, Prose Works, ii. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* ii. 75.

<sup>3</sup> *Second Defence of the People of England*, *ib.* i. 194.

Lastly, if you dread not to hear any truth, or any falsehood, whatever it may be, but if you shall least of all listen to those who think that they can never be free till they have the liberties of others depend on their caprice, and who attempt nothing with so much zeal and vehemence as to flatter, not only the bodies but the minds of men, who labour to introduce into the state the worst of all tyrannies, the tyranny of their own depraved habits and pernicious opinions ; you will always be dear to those who think not merely that their own sect or faction, but that all citizens of all descriptions, should enjoy equal rights and equal laws.'

What therefore we demand for ourselves it is necessary that we should permit to others. ' Is it ', he asks, ' a fair course to assert truth, by arrogating to himself the only freedom of speech, and stopping the mouths of others equally gifted ? '

But this freedom desired by Milton does not amount to doing as one likes, either in one's own thoughts or actions, or in one's relations with the state. On the contrary, it involves the deepest responsibilities. No man has ever had a higher conception of what is implied in liberty. ' To be free ', says Milton, ' is the same thing as to be pious, to be wise, to be frugal and abstinent, to be temperate and just, and lastly, to be magnanimous and brave ; and to be the opposite of these is to be a slave.'<sup>1</sup> It thus includes the duties of man to himself (for it is of no avail to be free from external interference if you are the slave of your own passions), his duties to his country, and to his God.

Liberty to Milton has therefore a necessary foundation in a deep sense of individual responsibility ; it presupposes

<sup>1</sup> Ib. i. 298.

a relentlessly high and exacting moral standard. And so it comes about that he who has made the fullest exposition of freedom has left us also the most eloquent eulogy of discipline. 'There is not that thing', he writes, 'in the world of more grave and urgent importance throughout the whole life of man, than is discipline. What need I instance! He that hath read with judgement of nations and commonwealths, of cities and camps, of peace and war, sea and land, will readily agree that the flourishing and decaying of all civil societies, all the moments and turnings of human occasions are moved to and fro as upon the axle of discipline. So that whatsoever power or sway in mortal things weaker men have attributed to fortune, I durst with more confidence (the honour of Divine Providence ever saved) ascribe either to the vigour or the slackness of discipline. Nor is there any sociable perfection in this life, civil or sacred, that can be above discipline; but she it is that with her musical cords preserves and holds all the parts thereof together. Hence in those perfect armies of Cyrus in Xenophon, and Scipio in the Roman stories, the excellence of military skill was esteemed, not by the not needing, but by the readiest submitting to the edicts of their commander. And certainly discipline is not only the removal of disorder; but, if any visible shape can be given to divine things, the very visible shape and image of virtue, whereby she is not only seen in the regular gestures and motions of her heavenly paces as she walks, but also makes the harmony of her voice audible to mortal ears. Yea, the angels themselves, in whom no disorder is feared, as the apostle that saw them in his rapture describes, are distinguished and quaternioned into their celestial principdoms and satrapies, according

as God himself has writ his imperial decrees through the great province of heaven.' <sup>1</sup>

This discipline in the state, so necessary for its prosperity and, in times of stress, even for its preservation, must be firmly based on the discipline which the individual exercises over those of his own household and, most of all, over himself. 'To come', says Milton, 'within the narrowness of household government, observation will show us many deep counsellors of state and judges to demean themselves incorruptibly in the settled course of affairs, . . . but look upon them when they are left to their own disciplining at home, and you shall soon perceive, for all their single knowledge and uprightness, how deficient they are in the regulating of their own family ; not only in what may concern the virtuous and decent composure of their minds in their several places, but that which is of a lower and easier performance, the right possessing of the outer vessel, their body, in sickness and health, rest or labour, diet or abstinence, whereby to render it more pliant to the soul, and useful to the commonwealth : which if men were but as good to discipline themselves, as some are to tutor their horses and hawks, it could not be so gross in most households.' <sup>2</sup>

Thus liberty is not static but dynamic, not a condition but a ceaseless activity. The whole of life for each one of us is a struggle against the ignorance that blinds, the luxury that weakens, the licence that destroys. The supreme sin against oneself and the state is the ungirt loin and the unlit lamp. It was Belial, 'graceful and humane' in outward semblance, but 'in nobler deeds timorous', who

Counselled ignoble ease and peaceful sloth,  
Not peace.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Reason of Church Government*, &c., Prose Works, ii. 441, 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* ii. 443.

<sup>3</sup> *Paradise Lost*, ii. 227.

And Belial's outstanding intellectual quality was that he 'could make the worse appear the better reason'. Slackness of body and mind, often defended on the grounds of freedom, is in reality freedom's deadliest foe, for

What more oft in nations grown corrupt  
Than to love bondage more than liberty,  
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty? <sup>1</sup>

And this is only true of the nation because in the first place it is true of the individual.

Against such a bondage Milton's life and writings are one splendid consistent protest. He held firmly to the doctrine of the survival of the fittest; he only differed from later upholders of the doctrine in having a fuller and profounder understanding of the meaning of the word 'fit'. He was saved from worship of fitness as mere brute force by his intellectual and spiritual idealism. He was saved from that common failing of the idealist, a contempt for the body and so for the part that mere physical strength must play in all progress towards the attainment of higher ends, whether for the individual or the state, by his belief in the intimate relation of body and soul. Body and soul to him are not two distinct things of which one may be mortified for the sake of the other. The whole man is soul, and the soul man, an animated, sensitive, and rational substance. Hence the active training of the body is necessary to the effective development of the soul. These ideas must have a place in all effective systems of education. Milton has left us his conception of what education should be; in detail we may dissent from some of it, and since it was designed only for the ruling class it presents a standard impossible

<sup>1</sup> *Samson Agonistes*, 269-71.



of universal attainment, but the general principles which it advocates will never be superseded. His very definition is in itself significant. 'I call therefore a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully, and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war.'<sup>1</sup> Our youth, he says, are to be 'inflamed with the study of learning and the admiration of virtue stirred up with high hopes of living like brave men and worthy patriots, dear to God and famous to all ages'. In opposition to that cramping spirit of specialism which produces excellence in one small branch of knowledge and leaves the whole man stunted and undeveloped he advocates some measure of comprehensive training. Among other things we may specially note that he asks for some attention to politics, or what we should rather call citizenship, 'that they may not, in a dangerous fit of the commonwealth, be such poor, shaken, uncertain reeds, of such a tottering conscience, as many of our great counsellors have lately shown themselves, but steadfast pillars of state.'<sup>2</sup> He calls us to study of poetry and the arts, not technically, but in order that we may learn to appreciate them, and strengthen the ideal sides of our nature by contact with the noblest things that have been thought and uttered. What religious, glorious, and magnificent use, he says, might be made of poetry! He advocates the cultivation of a love for nature, and suggests the widening influence of travel—and he insists on a regular and strenuous bodily training for all. 'Exercise in the exact use of their weapon will keep them healthy, nimble, strong, and well in breath, is also the likeliest means to make them grow large and tall, and to inspire them with a gallant

<sup>1</sup> *On Education*, Prose Works, iii. 467.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* 473.



and fearless courage, which being tempered with seasonable lectures and precepts to them of fortitude and true patience, will turn into an heroic and native valour, and make them hate the cowardice of doing wrong.'<sup>1</sup> And at times 'they are, by a sudden alarum or watchword, to be called out to their military motions, under sky or covert according to the season; that having in sport, but with much exactness and daily muster, served out the rudiments of their soldiership, they may as it were out of a long war come forth renowned and perfect commanders in the service of their country'.<sup>2</sup> All their education is to fit them for their life as free citizens of a free state; it is in the strict sense a liberal education. For it employs the principles of *liberty* and *discipline* to develop and control the full possibilities of each individual character.

This conception of liberty, as based upon a vigilant, strenuous, and highly trained virtue, was Milton's root belief. It is the leading idea in all his great imaginative writings, from *Comus* to *Samson Agonistes*.

Love virtue; she alone is free:  
She can teach you how to climb,

is the teaching of *Comus*. And that sublime outburst of the Lady, when her body is powerless against the spells of the Enchanter:

Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind<sup>3</sup>

is the exultant cry of Milton's own indomitable spirit, uncowed even by apparent failure in his lifelong battle against oppression. Thus Samson, though for the time he is sunk in impotence, the direct punishment of his enslavement to a weak passion, arouses himself to an act

<sup>1</sup> *On Education*, Prose Works, iii, 475.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* 476.

<sup>3</sup> *Comus*, 1020, 21; 663.

of heroic self-sacrifice by which he liberates his people and saves his soul. Milton's Samson is Samson Agonistes, the wrestler, the combatant :

He to Israel  
Honour hath left and freedom, let but them  
Find courage to lay hold on this occasion.  
And, which is best and happiest yet, all this  
With God not parted from him, as was feared,  
But favouring and assisting to the end.<sup>1</sup>

This same conception is a motive underlying *Paradise Lost*, though the peculiar nature of the subject has obscured from some eyes Milton's true attitude towards it. Since freedom, according to Milton, is based on virtue, it can only be found in the service of God; and it is God's rule, which is pure goodness, that makes all earthly domination immoral and unjust. Satan's rebellion is an attempt to upset that order and to create the tyrannical rule of irresponsible force. But, and here comes our difficulty in understanding Milton, whereas in heaven, where the rule is goodness, virtue means inactivity and acceptance; on our earth, where tyranny and vice are rampant, virtue means strenuous activity and protest. So that certain qualities which Milton most admired on earth, 'the courage never to submit and yield' and the opposition to established order, he is obliged by his story to transfer to Satan, the arch-enemy of the established order of heaven.

It is the same difficulty as makes the orthodox Biblical heaven so great a stumbling-block to the present-day Christian. To one who has fought the good fight on earth an eternity of waving palms and singing Hallelujahs in sublime unconcern of the misery and crimes of the earth that has just been left behind does not make an irresistible appeal. Even if such a prospect does not disturb us, we

<sup>1</sup> *Samson Agonistes*, 1714-16, 1718-20.

can well believe that Milton would have been terribly ill at ease in such a Zion. We may well suspect that before he had been there an hour he would have been restless, wanting perhaps to reorganize the processions, or to introduce a new mode of singing in the heavenly choirs. But whereas theological opinion to-day allows us our own conception of heaven, by the seventeenth-century Christian scripture was literally interpreted. Hence it comes about that though Satan is fighting against liberty and against virtue, the very fact that he is rebelling, as Milton on earth was obliged to rebel, forces the poet into some sympathy with his attitude. But it is a total delusion to imagine that Milton's sympathy with Satan went any farther than this. Every action that Satan commits is wrong, every motive that actuates him is base. He has no conception of liberty. He is the tyrant, who is fighting for his own ambition at the cost of the freedom of his followers. He has been led to it by a base jealousy of another's just authority and from a false sense of his own injured merit. As long as he is chief, he does not consider the welfare of his subjects. It is true that when they have been driven to hell he says:

Here at least

We shall be free, . . .

Here may we reign secure, and in my choice  
To reign is worth ambition, tho' in Hell.<sup>1</sup>

But *he* is the ruler and *they* the miserable subjects; hence his words, as Milton adds, 'bear semblance of worth, not substance'. His idea of freedom is very different from Milton's. And there are other points in his character worthy of our note. He has indeed a passionate admiration for his army. But when he views the vast number

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, i. 259-63.

of his troops his heart 'distends with pride, and hardening in his strength, glories'. The thought that his sin has plunged them into ruin wrings him with momentary anguish, yet it does not make him falter in his infamous purpose :

Cruel his eye, but cast  
Signs of remorse and passion to behold  
The fellows of his crime, the followers rather,  
(Far other once beheld in bliss) condemn'd  
For ever now to have their lot in pain,  
Millions of spirits for his fault amerc't  
Of Heav'n, and from Eternal Splendours flung  
For his revolt, yet faithful how they stood,  
Their glory withered.<sup>1</sup>

Satan sees, indeed, the tragedy of their noble fidelity to him, their tyrannic leader ; for he knows to what depths of ruin it is dragging them. So, it is said, Napoleon once wept before he led his troops to destruction ; so one can well imagine later commanders, repenting too late of the devastation that their insensate ambition has brought upon their own peoples. And we note, too, that his first defeat has come from his reckless confidence in the strength of his own resources ; because his armies are so powerful, they seem to him invincible :

What power of mind  
Foreseeing or presaging from the depth  
Of knowledge past or present, could have feared  
How such united force of Gods, how such  
As stood like these, could ever know repulse ? <sup>2</sup>

But now that he has been defeated, he accuses his adversary of having provoked the quarrel. It was

God's strength concealed  
That tempted our attempt, and wrought our fall ;<sup>3</sup>  
i.e. the Almighty ought to have shown His hand before.

<sup>1</sup> Ib. i. 604-12.

<sup>2</sup> Ib. i. 626-30.

<sup>3</sup> Ib. i. 642.

Satan's later methods are those of guile and fraud. He acts the liar and the spy. He continues to pose as the patron of liberty. But he strikes at his great foe by attacking and plotting the destruction of a weak and wholly innocent victim, and he excuses himself by the exigencies of circumstances—by necessity—

I am no purpos'd foe  
To you whom I could pity thus forlorn

he says to Adam and Eve. His heart bleeds as he reflects upon this onslaught upon those who wronged him not. But, as he says, the desire for

Honour and empire with revenge enlarg'd,  
By conquering this new world, compels me now  
To do what else though damn'd I should abhor.

And Milton adds the significant comment :

So spake the Fiend, and with necessity,  
The tyrant's plea, excus'd his devilish deeds.<sup>1</sup>

Satan's plan, as you remember, is for the time completely successful, and for the sake of his larger purpose he seduces to their destruction his unprotected victims. But he is himself degraded, even in his conquest, and from that very conquest draws all the nearer to his final inevitable defeat. His character degenerates, and with it his power of courageous resistance. He is 'wicked, and thence weak'.<sup>2</sup>

This is Milton's comment on the policy and the character of Satan, the enemy of true liberty.

Milton's hatred of all tyranny and oppression was not confined to his own country. He had an intense sympathy with the struggle for liberty in whatever land it might

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, iv. 373-4, 390-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* iv. 856.

manifest itself. 'Who knows not', he wrote, 'that there is a mutual bond of amity and brotherhood between man and man all over the world, neither is it the English sea that can sever us from that duty and relation. . . . It is not distance of place that makes enmity, but enmity that makes distance. He therefore that keeps peace with me, near or remote, of whatsoever nation, is to me, as far as all civil and humane offices, an Englishman and a neighbour.'<sup>1</sup> His defence of English freedom brought him the congratulations of those who sympathized with emancipators all over Europe. To the compliments addressed him by a distinguished Greek he replied: 'To the writings of illustrious Athenians I am indebted for all my proficiency in literature. Did I possess their command of language and their force of persuasion, I should feel the highest satisfaction in employing them to excite our armies and our fleets to deliver Greece, the parent of eloquence, from the despotism of the Ottomans. But we ought besides to attempt what is, I think, of the greatest moment, to inflame the present Greeks with an ardent desire to emulate the virtue, the industry, the patience, of their ancient progenitors; nor do I think that the Greeks should be wanting to themselves, nor that any other people should be wanting to the Greeks.'<sup>2</sup> As Latin foreign secretary it was Milton's duty to conduct the diplomatic correspondence with relation to the massacres in Piedmont. In 1655 the Duke of Savoy had ordered his reformed subjects in the Piedmont valley to conform to the Church of Rome or to quit their country, and he instituted a wholesale and brutal slaughter of those who declined to submit. The

<sup>1</sup> *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, Prose Works, ii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Letter to the renowned Leonard Philara, the Athenian*, ib. iii. 504.



indignation aroused in England and the sympathy felt for the innocent sufferers knew no bounds. Forty thousand pounds—no small sum in those days—was quickly collected for the relief of the survivors; and letters of remonstrance were written not only to the Duke of Savoy, but to all the European powers who had interest in the cause of freedom or were likely to fear and respect the opinion of England. Milton's letters<sup>1</sup> are couched in the dignified language of official diplomacy, which, however, show indignation enough. His personal feelings burst forth in his most magnificent sonnet:

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones  
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold,  
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,  
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones  
Forget not; in thy book record their groans  
Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold  
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese that rolld  
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans  
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they  
To Heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow  
O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth sway  
The triple tyrant; that from these may grow  
A hundred fold, who having learnt thy way  
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

As the result of England's firm remonstrance, the Duke of Savoy recalled his army and reinstated the survivors in their homes. Had he not done so there can be little doubt as to what course England, whose power under Cromwell was feared in the Continent as it was never feared before, would have taken to enforce her plea for justice.

Milton, like all free men, had a deep hatred for war. He saw in it all that was subversive of the higher development of humanity:

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of State*, Prose Works, ii. 248-64.



O shame to men ; devil with devil damn'd  
Firm concord holds, men only disagree  
Of creatures rational, though under hope  
Of heavenly grace, and God proclaiming peace,  
Yet live in hatred, enmity and strife  
Among themselves, and levy cruel wars,  
Wasting the earth, each other to destroy.  
As if, which might induce us to accord,  
Man had not hellish foes enow besides,  
That day and night for his destruction wait.<sup>1</sup>

He did not, like some modern philosophers, regard war as a necessary medicine for sick humanity ; he knew well enough that in the ordinary struggle of life against sin and oppression there was plenty of opportunity for exercising the heroism and self-sacrifice that some regard as only educed by war. He had no hesitation in his condemnation of all wars of conquest :

They err who count it glorious to subdue  
By conquest far and wide, to overrun  
Large countries, and in field great battles win,  
Great cities by assault ; what do these worthies,  
But rob, and spoil, burn, slaughter, and enslave  
Peaceable nations, neighbouring or remote,  
Made captive, yet deserving freedom more  
Than those their conquerors, who leave behind  
Nothing but ruin wheresoe'er they rove,  
And all the flourishing works of peace destroy,  
Then swell with pride, and must be titled gods,  
Great benefactors of mankind, deliverers ? <sup>2</sup>

Such was Milton's view of aggressive warfare.

But his own experience in his own country's struggle for liberty had shown him that in the last resort, and for a just cause, there was no appeal but the appeal to arms. He showed his attitude to war not by an unconditional

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, ii. 496-505.

<sup>2</sup> *Paradise Regained*, iii. 71-82.

refusal of the right to fight, but in his recognition that war was only the means to a just end, and that all through the struggle the end must never be lost sight of. For he realized that when war was over the problem was not solved, but was then really most acute. In his sonnet to General Fairfax, 'whose name in arms through Europe rings', he points this out clearly enough. These victories of yours, he says, are indeed glorious :

But yet a nobler task awaits thy hand  
 (For what can war, but endless war still breed ?)  
 Till truth and right from violence be freed  
 And public faith cleared from the shameful brand  
 Of public fraud.

To Cromwell, 'our chief of men', he makes a like appeal :

Much remains  
 To conquer still, peace hath her victories  
 No less renown'd than war—

unless we labour that at the end of war liberty for ourselves and others be truly secured, war will only breed endless wars, and peace, whatever the success of our arms, will not have her victories but the 'shameful brand of public fraud'. This same idea is developed, with matchless eloquence, in Milton's *Second Defence of the English People*, in his appeal first to Cromwell and then to the nation at large. The words, which primarily apply to the settlement of the internal affairs of England in the seventeenth century, are easily and with little alteration applicable to the international settlement for which we are all striving to-day. To Cromwell he says, as with some obvious modifications we might say to our own statesmen and generals :

'To you our country owes its liberties, nor can you sustain a character at once more momentous and more

august than that of the author, the guardian, and the preserver of our liberties. . . . Often reflect what a dear pledge the beloved land of your nativity has entrusted to your care. . . . Revere the fond expectations that we cherish, the solitudes of your anxious country ; revere the looks and the wounds of your brave companions in arms, who have so strenuously fought for liberty ; revere the shades of those who perished in the contest ; revere also the opinions and the hopes that foreign states entertain concerning us, who promise to themselves so many advantages from that liberty, which, if it be suffered to vanish like a dream, will involve us in the deepest abyss of shame ; and lastly revere yourself, and after having endured so many sufferings and encountered so many perils for the sake of liberty, do not suffer it either to be violated by yourself, or in one instance impaired by others. You cannot be truly free unless we are free too, for such is the nature of things, that he who entrenches on the liberty of others, is the first to lose his own and become a slave. But if you should afterwards invade that liberty which you have defended, your conduct must be fatally operative not only against the cause of liberty, but the general interests of piety and virtue. . . . At once wisely and discreetly to govern, to persuade people to relinquish inveterate and corrupt for new and beneficial maxims and institutions, to have the mind present and operative in every quarter, to reject the blandishments of pleasure and the pomp and power :—these are exertions compared with which the labour of war is mere pastime ; which will require every energy and employ every faculty that you possess, which demand a man supported from above, and almost instructed by immediate inspiration.’<sup>1</sup>

And then, turning to the people of England, he makes this passionate appeal :

‘ Unless your liberty, which is of such a kind as arms can neither procure nor take away, which alone is the fruit of piety, of justice, of temperance, shall have taken deep roots in your minds and hearts, there will not long

<sup>1</sup> *The Second Defence of the People of England*, Prose Works, i. 289-90.

be wanting one who will snatch from you by treachery what you have acquired by arms. War has made many great whom peace makes small. If after being released from the toils of war, you neglect the arts of peace, if your peace and your liberty be a state of warfare, if war be your only virtue, the summit of your praise, you will soon find peace most adverse to your interests. Your peace will only be a more distressing war, and that which you imagined liberty will prove the worst of slavery. . . . For if you think it is a more grand, or a more beneficial, or a more wise policy, to invent subtle expedients for increasing the revenue, to multiply our naval and military force, to rival in craft the ambassadors of foreign states, to form skilful treaties and alliances, than to administer unpolluted justice to the people, to redress the injured, to succour the distressed, and speedily to restore to every one his own, you are involved in a cloud of error, and too late you will perceive, when the illusion of those mighty benefits has vanished, that in neglecting these, which you now think inferior considerations, you have only been precipitating your own ruin and despair. The fidelity of enemies and allies is frail and perishing unless it be cemented by principles of justice; that wealth and those honours which most covet, readily change masters; they forsake the idle; they repair where virtue, where industry, where patience flourish most. Thus nation precipitates the downfall of nation, thus the more sound subverts the more corrupt. . . . I have not circumscribed my defence of liberty within the petty circle around me, but have made it so general and comprehensive that the justice and reasonableness of such uncommon occurrences, explained and defended, both among my own countrymen and among foreigners, and which all good men cannot but approve, may serve to exalt the glory of my country, and to excite the imitation of posterity.’<sup>1</sup>

Such are the glowing words in which Milton sums up the struggle for liberty in which he had himself borne a part, and calls upon his countrymen to be true, after

<sup>1</sup> *Second Defence of the People of England*, Prose Works, i. 295-9.

the battle has been won, to the spirit in which it had been fought. Who can read it to-day without seeing that it has a lesson for our time? Who can doubt that, great as the victory at arms must be if our cause is to prevail, a greater and more difficult task lies in the attainment of a just and permanent peace? Even as Milton reminded Fairfax and Cromwell, whilst still on the field of battle, of the causes for which they strove, and the difficulties that were ahead, so we too must think of the future and keep our minds in the proper attitude to deal with it. When history records its final verdict upon this great war and decides upon its real causes, it will be influenced not so much by what we are saying now, as by what we do afterwards. If we fall under the spell of that very spirit of militarism and selfish aggression that we execrate in others, if we imagine that our own freedom can be secured at others' expense, if we allow motives of recrimination, or vengeance, to usurp the seat of justice, history will surely convict us of hypocrisy, and place upon our brows 'the shameful brand of public fraud'. If, on the other hand, we are true to our professed faith, the faith which has found utterance in the public words of all our great leaders, we shall be worthy of Milton's proud eulogy of his country as 'the mansion-house of liberty', of liberty which is 'the nurse of all great wits', which 'hath rarify'd and enlightn'd our spirits like the influence of heaven'.<sup>1</sup>

There is much, then, as it seems to me, in the teaching of Milton that is of value for us to-day. There is still more in the example of his life. The conceptions of liberty and of discipline which find voice on every page of his writings are illustrated in all his actions. Early

<sup>1</sup> *Areopagitica*, ib. ii. 91, 94.

in life he was destined for the English Church, but he abandoned the idea on reaching full manhood, 'lest', he says, 'I should subscribe slave.' He now realized that his vocation was that of a student and a poet; and he set himself resolutely to perfect himself for his calling. 'What God has resolved for me', he wrote, 'I know not, but this I know, that he has instilled into me a vehement love of the beautiful. Not with so much labour is Ceres said to have sought her daughter Proserpine, as I am wont, day and night, to seek for this idea of the beautiful through all the forms and faces of things;'<sup>1</sup> and as he grew in years and strength he became conscious that it was his mission in life to leave behind him, for the honour of God and the glory of his country, some work so written that men should not willingly let it die. For this end, as he knew, poetic inspiration alone would not avail. 'To this', he said, 'must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation and insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs.' He submitted himself willingly to the severest training, that he might be fit for his great achievement. Though not rich, his circumstances were always affluent; but in all his habits he was rigorously frugal and abstinent, and he avoided every luxury and bodily self-indulgence, not only as unworthy of his high calling, but as liable to unfit him both in body and spirit for the attainment of it. Yet he did not neglect his body, for he knew that his health was essential. 'Up and stirring', he tells us, 'in winter often ere the sound of any bell awaken men to labour; in summer as oft with the bird that first rouses, or not much tardier, to read with good authors, . . . and then with useful and generous labours preserving

<sup>1</sup> *Familiar Letters to Carlo Deodati*, Prose Works, iii. 494.



the body's health and hardiness to render lightsome, clear, and not lumpish obedience to the cause of the mind, to the cause of religion, and our country's liberty, when it shall require firm hearts in sound bodies.' <sup>1</sup> He was, in fact, proficient with the broadsword, and, though slight in figure, had both strength and personal courage, physical as well as moral. His moral courage was first put to the test in his foreign travels, which occupied him in his 30th and 31st years. Mixing freely among all the scholars and literary men of Italy, he made many friends through the bonds of common sympathies and interests. But of religion, he tells us, 'I made this resolution, not of my own accord to introduce conversation about religion, but if asked respecting the faith, then, whatsoever I should suffer, to dissemble nothing.' Whenever his religion was attacked he defended it fearlessly; and he paid a second visit to Rome, though he was warned that he was running considerable risk in so doing. Then he received the news of the struggle between Charles and his Parliament, and turned his steps homeward, 'for I thought it disgraceful, while my fellow-countrymen were fighting for liberty, that I should be travelling abroad for pleasure.' <sup>2</sup> On his return he hesitated for a time as to what service he could best render, but he soon realized that it was to be his work to defend the cause of liberty with his pen, and by his writings to incite his countrymen to zeal and courage in its pursuit. 'I saw', he says, 'that the way was opening for the establishment of real substantial liberty, which is rather to be sought from within than without: and whose existence depends not so much on the terror

<sup>1</sup> *Apology for Smectymnuus*, ib. iii. 112.

<sup>2</sup> *Second Defence of the People of England*, ib. i. 256.



of the sword, as on sobriety of conduct and integrity of life. He perceived that there were three species of liberty essential to the happiness of social life—religious, domestic, and civil—and he set himself to defend each in turn.<sup>1</sup> Much of this writing alienated the sympathies of his friends and brought him into public disfavour ; but he was never the slave of a party or a phrase ; he was true throughout to his own fearless convictions of right. It must never be forgotten that all this work was uncongenial to him, that he was, as he tells us, writing it with his left hand, and to do it he had to put on one side all his cherished ambitions and leave undone the work which he felt to be his real destiny. But when he could help the immediate and pressing needs of England, his personal ambition and desires counted nothing. For twenty years—years that were the prime of his life—he renounced all thoughts of self, and gave himself unreservedly to the service of his country. He could not write poetry any more than he could travel abroad for pleasure, ‘ in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes.’ Of course there were those, both at the time and afterwards, who were ready to pour contempt on his achievement and to taunt him because he did not actually bear arms in defence of his cause. But he knew that the service which he performed was most suited to his genius and more necessary, and none can dispute the force of his reply to them :

‘ Though I did not share in the toils or dangers of the war, yet I was at the same time engaged in a service not less hazardous to myself and more beneficial to my fellow-citizens ; nor, in the adverse turns of our affairs, did I ever betray any symptoms of pusillanimity or dejection, or show myself more afraid than became

<sup>1</sup> *Second Defence of the People of England*, Prose Works, i. 258.

me of malice or of death. For since from my youth up I was devoted to the pursuit of literature, and my mind had always been stronger than my body, I did not court the labours of a camp, in which any common person would have been more service than myself, but resorted to that employment in which my services were likely to be of most avail. Thus with the better part of my frame I contributed to the success of the glorious cause in which we were engaged; and I thought that if God willed the success of such glorious achievements, that there should be others by whom those achievements should be recorded with dignity and elegance, and that the truth, which had been defended by arms, should also be defended by reason, which is the best and only legitimate means of defending it.'<sup>1</sup>

And to that defence he gave *more* than the best twenty years of his life, the prime of his manhood, for it was then that he became totally blind. Of the risk that he was running by incessant overwork he had been fully warned; but he paid no heed to the warning, and in the summer of 1652 his eyes, 'overplied in liberty's defence,' wholly failed him. If there is one man to whom, more than to the student, blindness is of all calamities the most awful, that man is the artist. Milton was student and artist in one. A smaller man would have sunk under the blow. Milton himself had his moments of despair, when his mind was as dark as his bodily vision, when his mood was that to which he gave reiterated voice in *Samson Agonistes*:

Nor am I in the list of them that hope.  
Hopeless are all my evils, all remediless.  
This one prayer yet remains, might I be heard,  
No long petition—speedy death,  
The close of all my miseries and the balm.<sup>2</sup>

But this was only a passing mood. His courage was indomitable, and never did he work more fiercely than

<sup>1</sup> Ib. i. 218-19.

<sup>2</sup> *Samson Agonistes*, 647-51.

in the year after his loss of sight. Later, if his duty called for no more energy, it demanded an even greater courage. Under the Commonwealth, independent as his utterances always were, he was in some measure at least the spokesman of the nation. On the death of Cromwell he was quickly to discover that in his defence of liberty he stood practically alone. But he fought on until the last unchanged

To hoarse and mute, tho' fallen on evil days,  
On evil days tho' fallen, and evil tongues;  
In darkness, and with dangers compassed round,  
And solitude.<sup>1</sup>

His own attitude of fearless courage he has expressed in the demeanour of the archangel Abdiel, who scorns to join the rebellion of Satan:

So spake the seraph Abdiel faithful found;  
Among the faithless, faithful only he;  
Among innumerable false, unmov'd,  
Unshaken, uneduc'd, unterrifi'd,  
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal;  
Nor number, nor example with him wrought  
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,  
Tho' single.<sup>2</sup>

Then at last, when no more work was left for him in the sphere of public duty, he turned to the fulfilment of his life's ambition; he took up again the poet's pen; and carried into an ideal world his hopes, his ideals, his disappointments, his contempt for the tyrant and the traitor, his passionate heroism in the defence of liberty and truth. In all the roll of heroic Englishmen there is no sublimer figure, no more inspiring example, than John Milton.

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, vii. 24-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* v. 893-900.

### III

## WORDSWORTH

No period in our history suggests a closer analogy with the present than do the early years of the nineteenth century, when England was standing up against the aggressive militarism of Napoleon, and giving a determined and wellnigh united support to the cause of her own freedom and of national independence, which was threatened throughout the length and breadth of Europe.

It is important to remember that this struggle with France had not begun as a war for freedom, nor was it in its early stages supported by the body of the nation. When in 1789 the Revolution was inaugurated by the fall of the Bastille, the English nation was for the most part enthusiastic in its cause. 'How much the greatest event it is that has ever happened in the world, and how much the best!' cried Fox, and his sentiments were echoed by the majority of his countrymen, without respect of class or political party. France had been the mainstay of despotism in Europe. Now she stood out as the pioneer of Liberty. Moreover, the first acts of the Revolutionists were conceived distinctly upon constitutional lines, an influential party in the Assembly deliberately looking to the English Constitution as their pattern. And though these sympathies were largely estranged by the violence of the Paris mob, and feelings of apprehension and anxiety as to the sequel were stimulated by the passionate eloquence of Burke, those who believed in the principle of national independence felt

that England had no call to interfere in the internal concerns of a foreign state. The people had a right to decide upon the form of government that pleased them. They had as much justification in deposing Louis and instituting a republic as we had in deposing the Stuarts and adopting the Hanoverians. And the English Government, which went to war with the French nation to restore a hated and rejected dynasty, did not itself represent in any true sense the views of the English people, whilst it only increased the antipathy of all liberal minds by its reactionary home policy—a policy contrary to the whole spirit of a free people—in its suspension of the *Habeas Corpus* Act and in its violent and capricious attempts to crush all sympathy with the ideas and acts of the Revolutionists. This attitude of the nation towards the war was changed not by the arguments of their government in favour of legitimacy, but by France's renunciation of her own ideal. For with the rise of Napoleon came a change in the policy of France, from the just defence of her rights as an independent nation to the lust for conquest, and to interference with the national rights of others ; and English lovers of liberty, while they neither forgot nor forgave the government its transgressions, and hated its internal reactionary policy as fervently as ever, ranged themselves in its support against the more dangerous tyranny of France. The war, we are told, had been styled ' just and necessary ' from the first ; it was not till after the subjugation of Switzerland (1798) that it was

' regarded by the body of the people as indeed both " just " and " necessary " ; and this justice and necessity were by none more clearly perceived, or more feelingly bewailed, than by those who had most eagerly opposed the war in its commencement, and who continued most bitterly to

regret that this nation had ever borne a part in it. Their conduct was herein consistent: they proved that they kept their eyes steadily fixed upon principles; for, though there was a shifting or transfer of hostility in their minds as far as regarded persons, they only combated the same enemy opposed to them under a different shape; and that enemy was the spirit of selfish tyranny and lawless ambition. . . . This spirit, when it became undeniably embodied in the French government, they wished in spite of all dangers should be opposed by war; because peace could not be procured without submission, which could not but be followed by a communion, of which the word of greeting would be, on the one part, insult,—and on the other, degradation. The people now wished for war, as their rulers had done before, because open war between nations is a defined and effectual partition, and the sword, in the hands of the good and the virtuous, is the most intelligible symbol of abhorrence. It was in order to be preserved from spirit-breaking submissions—from the guilt of seeming to approve that which they had not the power to prevent, and out of a consciousness of the danger that such guilt would actually steal upon them, and that thus, by evil communications and participations, would be weakened and finally destroyed, those moral sensibilities and energies, by virtue of which alone their liberties, and even their lives, could be preserved—that the people of Great Britain determined to encounter all perils which could follow in the train of open resistance.’<sup>1</sup>

In these words the poet Wordsworth, writing in the later years of the great struggle, summed up the feeling of the better part of the English people. It was a feeling that he himself entirely shared. As a young man he had been swept off his feet with enthusiasm for the Revolution. His early life among sturdy independent dalesmen and shepherds

<sup>1</sup> WORDSWORTH: *Concerning the Relations of Great Britain, Spain, and Portugal, to each other, and to the Common Enemy, at this Crisis; and specially as affected by the Convention of Cintra, 1809.* Ed. of Prose Works of Wordsworth, by W. Knight, 1896, i. 116.



had given him that instinctive democracy of feeling which revolts at tyranny of those who claim superiority from birth or wealth or rank. The beauties of nature that laid so deep a hold on his imagination—the natural inheritance of all those who had eyes to see and hearts to enjoy—seemed by reason of their universal appeal to

equalize in God's pure sight  
Monarch and peasant.<sup>1</sup>

And the easy good fellowship of life at a Cambridge college only served to extend the same sense of equality :

we were brothers all  
In honour, as in one community,  
Scholars and gentlemen.<sup>2</sup>

And so, when he went to France and saw the liberty and equality of the early Revolution, it seemed but the same principle working itself out upon a larger plan. This great upheaval which had shaken the whole civilized world to him

Seemed nothing out of Nature's certain course,  
A gift that was come rather late than soon.<sup>3</sup>

His first visit to France was paid in the Long Vacation of 1790, and he landed at Calais on July 13, the eve of the day on which the king was to take the oath of fidelity to the new constitution. All France was keeping holiday. He saw

How bright a face is worn, when joy of one  
Is joy for tens of millions.<sup>4</sup>

As he passed through the regenerated country, the cry rose instinctively from his own responsive heart :

Honour to the patriot's zeal,  
Glory and hope to new-born Liberty !  
Hail to the mighty projects of the time !<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Prelude*, Bk. vi. 455-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* ix. 227-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* ix. 247-8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ib.* vi. 348-9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ib.* vi. 441-3.



In the autumn of the next year he was once more in France, no longer as a mere tourist but as a resident, first at Orleans and then at Blois. He mixed freely among the officers of the French army, many of them preparing to flee to Germany and take up arms against their own country to bring back the hated Bourbons and regain their own lost privileges, but others ready to sacrifice all for the cause of the people. Among these was the lofty patriot Beaupuy. In his company Wordsworth set the seal upon his devotion to the popular cause, and once for all his heart was given to the people and his love was theirs. Alike from Beaupuy's precept and example he gained inspiration; and when his friend left for the front, where he was soon to fall in battle for his country, Wordsworth proceeded to Paris to offer his services to the cause of freedom. It was only the emptiness of his purse that brought him reluctantly back to England. Even the September massacres did not daunt his faith. 'A time of Revolution, he wrote in the next year, is not a season of true liberty. . . . Alas! the obstinacy and perversion of man is such that liberty is often obliged to borrow the arms of despotism to overthrow him; she deplores such necessity, but the liberty of the people, her supreme law, is her consolation.'<sup>1</sup> The excesses which he lamented were, as it seemed to him, but a stage in the progress towards a better state, and with the death of Robespierre in the next year he felt that all would be well. In the people, he said,

was my trust,  
And in those virtues which my eyes had seen.

His heart was torn in two by the conflict in which France and England were then engaged. Success to

<sup>1</sup> *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff, &c., by a Republican*, 1793, ed. Knight, i. 7.

France would mean the ruin of his country, which he loved with the passion of a poet and a lover ; success to England would result in the destruction of that liberty for which the Revolution had held out golden hopes, the shattering of his ideals of freedom. At no light cost his ideals triumphed ; and he tells how, in spite of all the ties that bound him to his native land, nay, partly because of them, he felt within him an awful exultation in her defeats and, conscious of her backslidings from her past greatness of mind, ' fed on the day of vengeance yet to come '.<sup>1</sup> But his soul had not yet plumbed the depths of agonized distraction that it was to experience ; for no sooner had he been driven to renounce his faith in his own country, than France, for whose ideals he had sacrificed her, began to play him false, and the liberty for which he had staked his all was betrayed. France changed a war of self-defence to one of conquest. In vain he fell back upon abstract principles. They profited him nothing. It was fundamental to his mind to look for some realization of his ideal, not in a far-off Utopia,

But in the very world, which is the world  
Of all of us, the place where in the end  
We find our happiness, or not at all !<sup>2</sup>

And now that France had failed him he was faced by a blank, an almost utter despair. From this he was rescued by the tender care of his sister Dorothy, who rekindled his love for simple and homely things.

She gave me eyes, she gave me ears ;  
And humble cares, and delicate fears ;  
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears,  
And love, and thought, and joy.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Prelude*, x. 299.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* x. 141-3.

<sup>3</sup> *The Sparrow's Nest*, ll. 17-20.

Thus his spirit was laid bare to the healing power of nature, and he learned to rebuild his hopes for man on the homely facts of human life and the simplest emotions of the human heart. At the same time his friendship for Coleridge gave a new stimulus to his perplexed and distracted intellect, enabling him to regain a reason for the faith that had returned to him. Yet for a year or two, though his eyes were averted from the European struggle that was waging with ever-increasing ominousness, his peace was not entirely made with his own country. This peace was effected very significantly by absence. In the winter of 1798-9 he was in Germany. As he paced daily the snow-bound ramparts of Goslar, on the edge of the Hartz forest, his mind was filled with thoughts of home. Here he wrote some of his most beautiful and intimate poems of English country and country life, and realized at once the depths and the nature of the foundations on which his love for England was based. 'We are right glad to find ourselves in England,' he wrote on his return, 'for we have learned to know its value.' And it was at Goslar that he wrote that deeply characteristic tribute to his native land :

I travelled among unknown men  
In lands beyond the sea ;  
Nor, England ! did I know till then  
What love I bore to thee.

'Tis past, that melancholy dream !  
Nor will I quit thy shore  
A second time ; for still I seem  
To love thee more and more.

Among thy mountains did I feel  
The joy of my desire ;  
And she I cherished turned her wheel  
Beside an English fire.

Thy mornings showed, thy nights concealed,  
The bowers where Lucy played ;  
And thine too is the last green field  
That Lucy's eyes surveyed.

These simple lines form Wordsworth's first patriotic poem, and innocent as they seem of all philosophical intention, they are of the very essence of his conception of patriotism. Its firmest roots are bedded in association, in our love for the scenes and the persons that have become dear to us from familiarity, in our memories, faint as they may be, of incidents, impressions, sensations, which, each one of them, contributed something to build up the beings that we are. Wordsworth has suggestively compared the active benevolence of spirit which inspires the virtuous man in all his diverse relations with mankind to the concentric circles of a spider's web, 'which are bound together by links, and rest upon each other, making one frame and capable of one tremor ; circles narrower and narrower, closer and closer, as they lie more near to the centre of self from which they proceeded and which sustains the whole.'<sup>1</sup> 'Love and admiration must push themselves out towards some quarters, otherwise the moral man is killed,' hence the growth from love of family and friends to local and then to national feeling. Thus nationality to Wordsworth is simply a larger form of individual human personality, and love of country is only a specialized and concentrated form of love for mankind. Those same rules, says Wordsworth, just, courteous, and humane, which govern the intercourse between individuals 'I apply to the conduct of large bodies of men, or of nations towards each other, because these are nothing but aggregates of individuals ; and because

<sup>1</sup> *Convention of Cintra*, &c., ed. Knight, i. 273.

the maxims of all just law, and the measures of all sane practice, are only an enlarged or modified application of those dispositions of love and those principles of reason, by which the welfare of individuals, in their connexion with each other, is promoted.' <sup>1</sup> He expresses this same truth elsewhere in its converse form :

' The man who feels no regret for the ruined honour of other nations, must be poor in sympathy for the honour of his own country ; and if he be wanting here towards that which circumscribes the whole, he neither has, nor can have, a social regard for the lesser communities which country includes. Contract the circle, and bring him to his family ; such a man cannot protect *that* with dignified love. Reduce his thoughts to his own person ; he may defend himself,—what he deems his honour, but it is the *action* of a brave man from the impulse of the brute, or the motive of a coward.' <sup>2</sup>

This doctrine permeates all Wordsworth's political teaching. The indispensable condition of a healthy patriotism lies in the opportunities afforded to each individual for a free development, independent of all external restrictions that will tend to hamper his natural growth, and the full exercise of all his natural functions both as regards himself and in his relations with his kind. His conception of social progress is governed by this principle. Much of Wordsworth's conservatism can be traced to his fear that changes which were hailed as an advance were really enslaving the people to the tyranny of wealth, that though the workman might gain in wages by his rush to the towns he lost in real individual independence and in the chance of developing his personality in its more intimate relationships. Similarly, his admiration for Fox was due to his feeling that Fox was the friend of the poor, and that to him no man's property was so

<sup>1</sup> Ib. p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> Ib. p. 258.

sacred as the property of the poor.<sup>1</sup> That statesman alone, he urged, could be successful who realized that the strength and health of the nation depended on the freedom and health and strength of the units that composed it, whose own love of his country had the same homely foundation as inspired the humblest patriot, and who devoted all his energies to fostering those conditions on which that patriotism might develop. This free individual life, imperfectly attained as it doubtless is, was the most precious inheritance of the English people; it was the prize which the French had won from their Revolution, only to lose it again to the selfish ambition of Napoleon. Hence sprang Wordsworth's deep hatred of Napoleon. It is significant that the first sign of his reawakening interest in public affairs is the sonnet in which he lays stress upon Bonaparte's complete lack of the qualities in his opinion necessary for the true leader of men:

I grieved for Bonaparté with a vain  
 And an unthinking grief! The tenderest mood  
 Of that Man's mind—what can it be? what food  
 Fed his first hopes? what knowledge could *he* gain?  
 'Tis not in battles that from youth we train  
 The Governor who must be wise and good,  
 And temper with the sternness of the brain  
 Thoughts motherly, and meek as womanhood.  
 Wisdom doth live with children round her knees:  
 Books, leisure, perfect freedom, and the talk  
 Man holds with week-day man in the hourly walk  
 Of the mind's business: these are the degrees  
 By which true Sway doth mount; this is the stalk  
 \ True Power doth grow on; and her rights are these.

Wordsworth's conception of the ideal patriot, 'the Happy Warrior' as he calls him, is drawn in direct anti-

<sup>1</sup> 'Letter to the Right Hon. Charles James Fox,' 1801, in *Memoirs of Wordsworth*, 1851, i. 166-71.



pathy with what seemed to him the character of Napoleon. Its main features are his subordination of personal ambition to the general good, his high sense of honour, his singleness of aim—his very prowess as a soldier springing, not from a callousness to slaughter, but from a spirit of self-sacrifice.

Who, doomed to go in company with Pain,  
And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train !  
Turns his necessity to glorious gain ;  
In face of these doth exercise a power  
Which is our human nature's highest dower ;  
Controls them and subdues, transmutes, bereaves  
Of their bad influence, and their good receives :  
By objects, which might force the soul to abate  
Her feeling, rendered more compassionate ;  
Is placable—because occasions rise  
So often that demand such sacrifice ;  
More skilful in self-knowledge, even more pure,  
As tempted more ; more able to endure,  
As more exposed to suffering and distress ;  
Thence, also, more alive to tenderness.

Finally he is one whose strength is based, not upon ambition or hatred, but upon love :

Whose powers shed round him in the common strife,  
Or mild concerns of ordinary life,  
A constant influence, a peculiar grace ;  
But who, if he be called upon to face  
Some awful moment to which Heaven has joined  
Great issues, good or bad for human kind,  
Is happy as a Lover ; and attired  
With sudden brightness, like a Man inspired ;  
And, through the heat of conflict, keeps the law  
In calmness made, and sees what he foresaw ;  
Or if an unexpected call succeed,  
Come when it will, is equal to the need :  
—He who, though thus endued as with a sense  
And faculty for storm and turbulence,  
Is yet a Soul whose master-bias leans  
To homefelt pleasures and to gentle scenes ;



Sweet images ! which, wheresoe'er he be,  
 Are at his heart ; and such fidelity  
 It is his darling passion to approve ;  
 More brave for this, that he hath much to love.<sup>1</sup>

In like manner, at the grave of Roy Roy, the Robin Hood of Scotland, Wordsworth excused the lawlessness of the Scottish robber chief by contrasting his motives with those of Bonaparte. If Napoleon had been actuated by the spirit of Rob Roy then indeed France would have prospered in her quest for freedom :

For Thou, although with some wild thoughts,  
 Wild Chieftain of a savage Clan !  
 Hadst this to boast of ; thou didst love  
 The *liberty* of man.

And, had it been thy lot to live  
 With us who now behold the light,  
 Thou wouldst have nobly stirred thyself,  
 And battled for the Right.

For thou wert still the poor man's stay,  
 The poor man's heart, the poor man's hand ;  
 And all the oppressed, who wanted strength,  
 Had thine at their command.

In August 1802, Wordsworth took advantage of the short-lived peace of Amiens to revisit France. As with many a fear for his dear country he lingered among men that did not love her, absence from England served once again to strengthen his patriotic fervour. It was a different France from that in which, twelve years before, he had witnessed the rejoicings of a too credulous day

When faith was pledged to new-born liberty.<sup>2</sup>

Now, Napoleon was being proclaimed Consul for life,

<sup>1</sup> *The Happy Warrior*, ll. 12-26, 45-64.

<sup>2</sup> Sonnet composed near Calais, 1802, *Jones ! as from Calais, &c.*

and the poet, whilst he viewed with scorn the crowds of the rich and worldly hurrying to Paris to bend the knee before the destroyer of their liberties, and noted with pity the sullen indifference of the common people, turned his own mind to those typical acts of tyranny against state and individual by which Napoleon had been exposed in his true colours. The sonnet on the extinction of the Venetian Republic, betrayed by Bonaparte into the hand of Austria, is a passionate lament for vanished liberty and greatness :

Once did She hold the gorgeous east in fee ;  
And was the safeguard of the west : the worth  
Of Venice did not fall below her birth,  
Venice, the eldest Child of Liberty.  
She was a maiden City, bright and free ;  
No guile seduced, no force could violate ;  
And, when she took unto herself a Mate,  
She must espouse the everlasting Sea.  
And what if she had seen those glories fade,  
Those titles vanish, and that strength decay ;  
Yet shall some tribute of regret be paid  
When her long life hath reached its final day :  
Men are we, and must grieve when even the Shade  
Of that which once was great is passed away.

The imprisonment of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the negro chieftain of St. Domingo who had vainly resisted Napoleon's edict for re-establishing that slavery which the French Convention had just abolished, stirred within him imaginative reflections of a yet sublimer cast :

Toussaint, the most unhappy man of men !  
Whether the whistling Rustic tend his plough  
Within thy hearing, or thy head be now  
Pillowed in some deep dungeon's earless den ;—  
O miserable Chieftain ! where and when  
Wilt thou find patience ! Yet die not ; do thou  
Wear rather in thy bonds a cheerful brow :  
Though fallen thyself, never to rise again,  
Live, and take comfort. Thou hast left behind

Powers that will work for thee ; air, earth, and  
skies ;

There 's not a breathing of the common wind  
That will forget thee ; thou hast great allies ;  
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,  
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

For the cause of liberty, for which Toussaint strove, is firmly rooted in natural law, and all the nobler instincts of humanity are responsive to its thrill. Those same exultations and agonies, he urges, that same love and unconquerable mind, must be potent in us if we are to repel this frightful neighbourhood<sup>1</sup> of a foe, who wars not only against us but against the very principles on which nature and human life are based.

If England was a great nation she owed it to her past, to its virtue, to its courage, and to its noble independence, working in harmony with that natural law in which liberty and discipline were indissolubly linked :

Winds blow and waters roll  
Strength to the brave, and Power and Deity.  
Yet in themselves are nothing ! One decree  
Spake laws to *them*, and said that by the Soul  
Only, the Nations shall be great and free.<sup>2</sup>

Hence Wordsworth would rouse the nation to a fuller return to the ideals upon which her greatness was founded. There is no trace of self-righteousness in his patriotism. He does not fear to reason with the people on their faults, to upbraid, even to denounce. England had fallen away from her high ideals. He was conscious within his own country of a love of ostentation and display which infected her moneyed worldlings ; contrasting not only with the good old times of England but even with the life of their present enemy, France :

<sup>1</sup> Sonnet, *Inland, within a hollow vale*, &c., l. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.*, ll. 10-14.

The wealthiest man among us is the best :  
No grandeur now in nature or in book  
Delights us. Rapine, avarice, expense,  
This is idolatry ; and these we adore :  
Plain living and high thinking are no more :  
The homely beauty of the good old cause  
Is gone ; our peace, our fearful innocence,  
And pure religion breathing household laws.<sup>1</sup>

And conceiving of a nation as ' a solemn fraternity gathered together under the shade of ancestral feeling ', he turns naturally enough to the great pattern of English patriotism in the past, the noblest expounder of her liberties :

Milton ! thou shouldst be living at this hour :  
England hath need of thee : she is a fen  
Of stagnant waters : altar, sword, and pen,  
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,  
Have forfeited their ancient English dower  
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men ;  
Oh ! raise us up, return to us again ;  
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.  
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart ;  
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea :  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,  
So didst thou travel on life's common way,  
In cheerful godliness ; and yet thy heart  
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

Wordsworth owed more to Milton than to any other of his predecessors, just as there is an obvious likeness in the dignity and simplicity of their minds ; and it can truly be said of his political utterances, that whenever he speaks of liberty with passion and insight the spirit of Milton may be discerned, moving upon the face of the waters.

Under the stress of present and immediate danger the poet now fears, now hopes. At one moment it would

<sup>1</sup> Sonnet: written in London, 1802, *O Friend*, &c., ll. 7-14.

seem impossible that we could prove untrue to so glorious a heritage :

In our halls is hung  
Armoury of the invincible knights of old :  
We must be free or die, who speak the tongue  
That Shakespeare spake ; the faith and morals hold  
Which Milton held. In everything we are sprung  
Of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold.

Yes, but do we hold that faith ? Have we not forfeited our titles to our heritage ? Come, let us confess our shortcomings and face the bitter truth. We have had a fair seed-time but our trespasses have ruined the harvest that should have followed ; even at this day we could not be trusted to put the sacredness of our cause before what seemed our own immediate profit. So that if ' O England ', exclaims the poet, ' the wise pray for thy success, it is not because of thy virtue, but because France is the more ignorant, the more abject enemy of Truth and Justice :

Oh grief that Earth's best hopes rest all with Thee ! ' <sup>1</sup>

But these fears for his country, and his humiliation at her decline are the outcome of love ; and true love, if never blind as it is sometimes falsely said, is at least incapable of despair. With all her shortcomings Wordsworth saw in his country ' a bulwark for the cause of men '. If this had not been clear before, the invasion of Switzerland in the autumn of 1802 made it doubly clear. Freedom's one hope lay now in England's resistance to the death ; and in the greatness of her cause he saw the hope of her regeneration. War broke out again in May 1803, when Bonaparte was planning a descent upon England from Boulogne. Wordsworth's patriotism now burst into a flame. He was among the volunteers enrolled by Pitt

<sup>1</sup> Sonnet, *England, the time is come*, &c.

for the defence of the country. 'At Grasmere', he wrote, 'we have turned out almost to a man'. He saw in this war for freedom not only the expression of moral virtue but a great moral instrument which would rouse the nation from its self-indulgent apathy, and by suffering bring home to it the virtues that it had seemed to lose. To the Men of Kent, who would be the first to bear the brunt of an invasion, he wrote a stirring appeal, and he penned a sonnet anticipating the arrival of the foe and their defeat. Even in our losses for such a cause there would be matter for rejoicing.

Divine must be  
That triumph, when the very worst, the pain,  
And even the prospect of our brethren slain,  
Hath something in it which the heart enjoys :—  
In glory will they sleep and endless sanctity.<sup>1</sup>

This sentiment has often been criticized. Is indeed the loss of those that are dear to us anything but a matter of sorrow? Truly it is a hard saying. Yet it comes of Wordsworth's sublime faith in the invincibility of the human spirit. 'The true sorrow of humanity', he wrote, 'consists in this: not that the mind of man fails; but that the course and demands of action and of life so rarely correspond with the dignity and intensity of human desires.'<sup>2</sup> Here, at least, in death for a great cause, is man's glorious opportunity. It was in this spirit that the great poet of Belgium wrote words to which recent events have given a sublime significance:

. . . notre force est en nous et nous avons souffert  
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Même notre douleur . . . devient notre orgueil.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sonnet, *Anticipation*. October 1803.

<sup>2</sup> *Convention of Cintra*, &c., p. 272.

<sup>3</sup> Verhaeren, *La Multiple Splendeur*, p. 157.



And Wordsworth throughout the struggle with Napoleon loved most to celebrate, not victories, but heroic men or nations overmastered by fearful odds, yet having a spirit undaunted by defeat, unchanged though fallen on evil days. Such as we have seen was Toussaint L'Ouverture, such were Hofer and Palafox, such were the gallant Tyrolese, into whose mouth the poet puts this burning resolve :

The land we from our fathers had in trust,  
And to our children will transmit, or die ;  
This is our maxim, this our piety ;  
And God and Nature say that it is just.  
That which we *would* perform in arms—we must !  
We know the arduous strife, the eternal laws  
To which the triumph of all good is given,  
High sacrifice, and labour without pause,  
Even to the death :—else wherefore should the eye  
Of man converse with immortality ? <sup>1</sup>

As we all know, Napoleon's projected invasion of England was thwarted at Trafalgar, and immediate danger passed ; but his sweeping successes at Austerlitz against the Austrians, and at Jena against the Germans, left England almost alone. At each blow to the allied arms Wordsworth's courage rose.

Another year !—another deadly blow !  
Another mighty Empire overthrown !  
And We are left, or shall be left, alone ;  
The last that dare to struggle with the Foe.  
'Tis well ! from this day forward we shall know  
That in ourselves our safety must be sought ;  
That by our own right hands it must be wrought ;  
That we must stand unpropped, or be laid low.  
O dastard whom such foretaste doth not cheer !  
We shall exult, if they who rule the land  
Be men who hold its many blessings dear,  
Wise, upright, valiant ; not a servile band,  
Who are to judge of danger which they fear,  
And honour which they do not understand.

<sup>1</sup> *Feelings of the Tyrolese*, 1-5, 24-28.



Then the prime interest of this gigantic struggle shifted its scene to the Peninsula. Napoleon invaded Spain, half terrorized and half outwitted the impotent ruling dynasty, and placed his brother Joseph on the throne. But where the corrupt court had yielded weakly, the mass of the people rose against the foreign tyrant, and struck a determined blow for national independence and liberty. The cause of Spain roused England as she had not been roused during the whole previous course of the war; and when Sir Arthur Wellesley landed in Portugal with an expeditionary force and routed the French general Junot at Vimiera, English enthusiasm knew no bounds. But this joy was quickly turned to a savage gloom by the announcement that Sir Hew Dalrymple, who had succeeded Wellesley in command, instead of following up the victory and threatening the French army with almost certain annihilation, had signed an agreement known as the Convention of Cintra, by which (without so much as consulting his Portuguese and Spanish allies) he allowed Junot to evacuate Portugal with all his ill-gotten Spanish booty, and undertook to convey his troops back to France in British ships. The news was received in England with shame and dismay. The City of London petitioned the King for an inquiry, and when the House of Commons signified its approval of the terms of the Convention it probably reached the furthest limit of its cynical indifference to those whom it professed to represent. No one felt a deeper indignation than Wordsworth. 'Never did any event', he affirmed years later, 'cause in my mind so much sorrow.' We have seen how the belief in the sanctity of the principle of nationality had led him in 1793 to side with France against his own country, and when France

herself defied that principle he had followed the struggles of Austria, Switzerland, Italy, and Germany with a passionate interest. And now his enthusiasm for the cause was kindled to an even higher pitch in that whereas all previous opponents of Napoleon's aggression had been unrepresentative governments, the Spanish rising was the spontaneous outburst of a great moral impulse among the people, and sprang from a noble independence of individual character. The splendid courage of the Spaniards at Saragossa, where for months they kept at bay vastly superior numbers of highly trained French troops, stirred him as the defence of Liège stirred us so short a time ago. Wordsworth's trust, let us remember, had ever been with the plain people, and his love was theirs. Here in the action of Spain, and in England's ready sympathy with Spain, was the triumphant vindication of his faith. In the conviction that this cause of freedom had been betrayed by the English Government, he penned his pamphlet on the *Convention of Cintra*, denouncing the weakness of those in authority and appealing from them to the great heart of the nation, which he believed, and believed rightly, was inspired with a nobler ideal than its rulers.

‘ For, when the people speaks loudly, it is from being strongly possessed either by the Godhead or the Demon ; and he, who cannot discover the true spirit from the false, hath no ear for profitable communion. But in all that regarded the destinies of Spain, and her own as connected with them, the voice of Britain had the unquestionable sound of inspiration. If the gentle passions of pity, love, and gratitude be porches of the temple ; if the sentiments of admiration and rivalry be pillars on which the structure is sustained ; if, lastly, hatred and anger and vengeance be steps which, by a mystery of nature, lead to the House of Sanctity ;—then was it mani-

fest to what power the edifice was consecrated ; and that the voice within was of Holiness and Truth.

‘ Spain had risen not merely to be delivered and saved ; deliverance and safety were but intermediate objects ; regeneration and liberty were the end, and the means by which this end was to be attained ; had their own value ; were determined and precious ; and could no more admit of being departed from, than the end of being forgotten. She had risen not merely to be free ; but, in the act and process of acquiring that freedom, to recompense herself, as it were in a moment, for all which she had suffered through ages ; to levy, upon the false fame of a cruel Tyrant, large contributions of true glory ; to lift herself, by the conflict, as high in honour—as the disgrace was deep to which her own weakness and vices, and the violence and perfidy of her enemies, had subjected her.’<sup>1</sup>

For worse even than the violence of the oppressor, because it was a deeper insult to moral feeling, was his perfidy, and his arrogant assumptions of beneficence to the people whose country he was laying waste. When Napoleon posed as the future benefactor of Spain, as other conquerors since have advertised the blessings of their culture to the people they have brutally destroyed, Wordsworth voiced his sense of outrage in a noble sonnet, put, with dramatic fitness, into the mouth of an indignant Spaniard :

We can endure that He should waste our lands,  
Despoil our temples, and by sword and flame  
Return us to the dust from which we came ;  
Such food a Tyrant’s appetite demands ;  
And we can brook the thought that by his hands  
Spain may be overpowered, and he possess,  
For his delight, a solemn wilderness  
Where all the brave lie dead. But, when of bands  
Which he will break for us he dares to speak,  
Of benefits, and of a future day

<sup>1</sup> *Ib.* p. 205.

When our enlightened minds shall bless his sway ;  
*Then*, the strained heart of fortitude proves weak ;  
 Our groans, our blushes, our pale cheeks declare  
 That he has power to inflict what we lack strength to  
 bear.<sup>1</sup>

With pride Wordsworth recalls how in this struggle for the realization of her true self Spain had turned for aid to England.

‘ Independence and liberty were the blessings for which the people of the Peninsula were contending—immediate independence, which was not to be gained but by modes of exertion from which liberty must ensue. Now liberty, healthy, matured, time-honoured liberty—this is the growth and peculiar boast of Britain, and Nature herself, by encircling with the ocean the country which we inhabit, has proclaimed that this mighty nation is for ever to be her own ruler, and that the land is set apart for the home of immortal independence.’<sup>2</sup>

But how, he asks, have we answered the call of Spain ?

‘ We had power to give a brotherly aid to our allies in supporting the mighty world which their shoulders had undertaken to uphold ; and, while they were expecting from us this aid, we undermined—without forewarning them—the ground on which they stood. The evil is incalculable, and the stain will cleave to the British name as long as the story of this island shall endure.’<sup>3</sup>

‘ O misery for England, the land of liberty and courage and peace ; the land trustworthy and long approved ; the home of lofty example and benign precept ; the central orb to which, as to a fountain, the nations of the earth “ ought to repair, and in their golden urns draw light ” ; —O sorrow and shame for our country ; for the grass which is upon her fields, and the dust which is in her graves ;—for her good men who now look upon the day ; and her long train of deliverers and defenders, her Alfred, her Sidneys, and her Milton ; whose voice yet speaketh

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *ib.* p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* p. 192.

<sup>3</sup> *Ib.* p. 220.

for our reproach ; and whose actions survive in memory to confound us, or to redeem ! ' <sup>1</sup>

It is to achieve this redemption that Wordsworth pours forth his passionate eloquence. ' The theme is justice and my voice is raised for mankind ; for us who are alive and for all posterity : justice and passion ; clear-sighted aspiring justice, and passion sacred as vehement.' But England has only failed through the weakness and folly of her rulers ; the heart of her people is sound, and in spite of the attempt of her rulers to stifle their just complaints, the people must insist upon their demands. Our statesmen do not know the hearts of the people ; immersion in intrigues, in self-seeking, in place-hunting, has blinded their eyes to the pure emotions that sway the hearts of the people, who see more clearly because they see disinterestedly.

' In the course of the last thirty years ', he goes on, ' we have seen two wars waged against liberty—the American War and the war against the French people in the early stages of their Revolution. And, for what more especially belongs to ourselves at this time, we may affirm—that the same presumptuous irreverence of the principles of Justice, and blank insensibility to the affections of human nature, which determined the conduct of our Government in those two wars *against* liberty, have continued to accompany its exertions in the present struggle *for* liberty—and have rendered them fruitless. The British Government deems no doubt that its intentions are good. It must not deceive itself. Intentions, thoroughly good, could not mingle with the unblest actions which we have witnessed. A disinterested and pure intention is a light that guides as well as cheers, and renders desperate lapses impossible. Our duty is—our aim ought to be, to employ the true means of liberty and virtue for the ends of liberty and virtue. In such policy, thoroughly understood, there is fitness

<sup>1</sup> Ib. p. 203.

and concord and rational subordination. It deserves a higher name,—organization, health, and grandeur. . . . Events [in Spain] have shown clearly enough that the cause of the people, in dangers and difficulties issuing from oppression, is safe whilst it remains not only in the bosoms but in the hands of the people; or (what amounts to the same thing) in those of a Government which, being truly *from* the people, is faithfully *for* them.’<sup>1</sup>

Let our own rulers remember this and look into their own hearts. Let them deal with the people sincerely. Let them have faith and courage. If they find selfishness or slackness in individuals or sections of society, let them be all the more active and vigilant themselves. ‘If my neighbour fails,’ says the true patriot, ‘more devolves on me.’<sup>2</sup> As for the immediate end in view, that is clear enough.

‘The first end to be secured by Spain is riddance of the enemy; the second, permanent independence; and the third, a free constitution of government; which will give their main, though far from sole, value to the other two; and without which little more than a formal independence can be secured. Humanity and honour and justice, and all the sacred feelings connected with atonement, retribution, and satisfaction; shame that will not sleep, and the sting of unperformed duty; and all the powers of the mind, the memory that broods over the dead and turns to the living, the understanding, the imagination, and the reason;—demand and enjoin that the wanton oppressor should be driven, with confusion and dismay, from the country which he has so heinously abused.’<sup>3</sup>

But Wordsworth does not underrate the power of his antagonist. He realizes the strength of immense and highly trained armies, ‘under the control of an absolute despotism, . . . acting avowedly upon the principle that everything which can safely be done by the supreme

<sup>1</sup> Ib. pp. 231–44.

<sup>2</sup> Ib. p. 249.

<sup>3</sup> Ib. p. 250.



power of a State, may be done.' His faith in ultimate conquest rests in the unconquerable spirit of the allied nations, who are actuated in their resistance by impulses deep as the springs of their nature :

The power of armies is a visible thing,  
Formal, and circumscribed in time and space ;  
But who the limits of that power shall trace  
Which a brave People into light can bring  
Or hide, at will,—for freedom combating  
By just revenge inflamed ? <sup>1</sup>

And that power is alive not in Spain and England only, but throughout the whole of Europe.

' It must be obvious ', he says, ' to a reflecting mind, that everything which is desperately immoral, being in its constitution monstrous, is of itself perishable : decay it cannot escape ; and further it is liable to sudden dissolution. For *he* stands upon a hideous precipice (and it will be the same with all who may succeed to him and his iron sceptre)—he who has outlawed himself from society by proclaiming, with word and act, that he acknowledges no mastery but power. . . . For present annoyance, [Napoleon's] power is, no doubt, mighty, but liberty in which it originated and of which it is a depravation, is far mightier, and the good in human nature is stronger than the evil. If the tide of success were by any effort fairly turned, occasion would be given for the discontented to break out, and above all for the triumph of human nature, it would then be seen whether men fighting in a bad cause—men without magnanimity, honour, or justice—could recover, and stand up against champions, who by these virtues were carried forward in good fortune, as by these virtues in adversity they have been sustained. As long as guilty actions thrive, guilt is strong ; it has a giddiness and transport of its own, a hardihood not without superstition, as if Providence were a party to its success. But disaster opens the eyes of conscience, and in the minds of men who have been employed in bad actions, defeat and a feeling of punishment are inseparable.

<sup>1</sup> *Sonnet*, 1811.



‘On the other hand, the power of an unblemished heart and a brave spirit is shown, in the events of war, not only among unpractised citizens and peasants, but among troops in the most perfect discipline. . . . This paramount efficacy of moral causes . . . is indisputable.’<sup>1</sup>

Let us take hope also from the reflection that the justice of our cause and our readiness to suffer for it, unite us with the great men that have gone before us.

‘There is a spiritual community binding together the living and the dead, the good, the brave, and the wise of all ages. We would not be rejected from this community, and therefore do we hope. We look forward with erect mind, thinking and feeling: it is an obligation of duty; take away the sense of it, and the moral being would die within us. Among the most illustrious of that fraternity, whose encouragement we participate, is an Englishman who sacrificed his life in devotion to a cause bearing a stronger likeness to this than any recorded in history. It is the elder Sidney . . . who, treating of the War in the Netherlands against Philip of Spain, thus writes: “If her Majesty”, says he, “were the fountain, I should fear, considering what I daily find, that we should wax dry. But she is but a means whom God useth. And I know not whether I am deceived, but I am fully persuaded that if she would withdraw herself, other springs would rise to help this action. For methinks, I see the great work indeed in hand against the abusers of the world, wherein it is no greater fault to have confidence in man’s power, than it is too hastily to despair of God’s work.”’<sup>2</sup>

These short extracts do but scant justice to Wordsworth’s noble pamphlet, which, little read as it was at the time of its publication, and almost entirely neglected to-day, was pronounced by Canning to be the finest piece of eloquence since Burke, and claims close kinship with the greatest political utterances of Milton. It is indeed

<sup>1</sup> *Convention of Cintra, &c.*, pp. 264-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* pp. 272-3.

written in a style too lofty to achieve an easy popularity ; yet in its magnificent assertion of high national ideals, and in its recognition of the true grounds of national greatness and the materials of national hope it is far more than an occasional production. Who does not see in the Spain of 1810 much to remind him of the Belgium and the France of to-day, and in the unscrupulous aims and methods of Spain's enemy no shadowy likeness of their enemy and ours ? and who is so dull that he cannot gain some inspiration from the principles on which Wordsworth bases our resistance and by reason of which he anticipates our triumph ? The chief obstacle which Wordsworth had to face does not impede our path, for our Government represents the people and has its confidence ; and the issue of the conflict depends not upon forcing their hand, but rather upon our readiness to support them in accomplishing an end which is theirs no less than ours. But in other respects the two positions are strangely similar, and may they have the same issue !

Thus Wordsworth pressed for the determined prosecution of the war. But strongly as he believed in military ardour as in itself at that time an instrument of the moral as well as the material salvation of the people, and though, indeed, he had a fuller faith in the moral value of war altogether than the majority of us to-day, he saw the limits of its dominion. He had no love of military glory for its own sake.

‘ Highly ’, he said, ‘ as I rate the importance of military power, and deeply as I feel its necessity for the protection of every excellence and virtue, I rest my hopes of the emancipation of Europe upon moral influences, and the wishes and opinions of the people of the respective nations. . . . Something higher than military excellence must be taught *as* higher ; something more fundamental *as* fundamental.’

To a friend who saw in the war a chance for aggression and for extending the sphere of British arms, he wrote :

'The sword, as the sword, can give no rights. . . . The spirit of conquest never can confer true glory and happiness upon a nation that has attained power sufficient to defend itself. . . . I wish to see Spain, Italy, France, Germany, formed into independent nations, nor have I any desire to reduce the power of France further than may be necessary for that end. . . . Indefinite progress undoubtedly there ought to be somewhere, but let that be in knowledge, in science, in civilization, in the increase of the numbers of the people and in the augmentation of their virtue and happiness. . . . Military policy merely will not perform all that is needful, nor mere military virtues. . . . England, as well as the rest of Europe, requires what is more difficult to give it,—a new course of education, a higher tone of moral feeling, more of the grandeur of the imaginative faculties and less of the petty processes of the unfeeling and purblind understanding, that would manage the concerns of nations in the same calculating spirit with which it would set about building a house. Now a state ought to be governed upon calculations and from impulses similar to those which give motion to the hand of a great artist when he is preparing a picture, or of a mighty poet when he is determining the proportions and the march of a poem ;—much is to be done by rule ; the great outline is previously to be conceived in distinctness, but the consummation of the work must be trusted to resources that are not tangible, though known to exist.'<sup>1</sup>

It is upon these spiritual resources, *not tangible, though known to exist*, that we, like Wordsworth, must set our ultimate reliance. If we place our ideal high enough and show our faith in it, to be at once living and resolute, we shall achieve that further end which lies beyond our immediate object of military conquest, for

by the soul  
Only, the Nations shall be great and free.

<sup>1</sup> *Letter to Captain Pasley, March 28, 1811, Prose Works, ed. Knight, i. 308–22.*

#### IV

### ENGLISH POETRY SINCE 1815

IN earlier lectures we have noted how Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth reflected the finest spirit of their times, and how each one of them taught to his age that lesson which it most needed for its salvation. Shakespeare, writing for a nation which had just risen, after facing a supreme peril from without, to a consciousness of its own great destiny, laid emphasis upon the imperative need for unity; and whilst he gloried in the spirit of enterprise and adventure which he felt in the air about him, insisted that true power could only rest upon a foundation of justice.

Out of this national strength grew, naturally enough, the desire for fuller personal liberty; and the significance of liberty to the individual, both in his private capacity and in his relations with the state, broke upon Milton in the progress of the struggle between king and people, and was expounded by him with insight and finality.

But in the seventeenth century civilization was not yet ripe for the complete logical development of Milton's creed. This only dawned upon the world with the French Revolution, and it entered our poetry with the writings of Wordsworth. Before this time the phrase 'national independence and liberty' would have had little meaning. In very few countries was government in any sense representative, in most it was entirely despotic, so that peoples went to war for their kings' quarrels rather than for their own. A nation might simply mean a hetero-

geneous collection of geographical areas, only bound together in service to one king ; hence there was little idea of nationality, as we conceive it, as a political unity formed of men joined, if not by ties of race and language, at least by common ideals, common sentiment, and common consent. But the French Revolution introduced a new idea of liberty. ' That idea ', says the historian of international politics,<sup>1</sup> ' has two forms. One is the internal form, popular government ; the government of a state, not by an autocrat or by a privileged class, but by the mass of the nation. The other is external liberty, the freedom of the state itself from control by its neighbours, whether over its internal institutions or over its relations with foreign states. These two forms of liberty are not necessarily found together. . . . But in spite of their occasional separation there is a close connexion between them. The free exercise of its activities, which every energetic and independent character demands, leads to both ; and whenever a people endowed with such a character is possessed of one of the forms of liberty, it will not fail, sooner or later, to demand the other.'

In England, national independence had not been seriously threatened since the days of the Armada ; but in the Napoleonic wars that independence was once more at stake, and the circumstances of the struggle, in which she found herself fighting side by side with other nations for a like cause, gave her some insight into the true significance of nationality. In internal liberty she had been so much in advance of other nations that she had

<sup>1</sup> ' Introduction to International History of Europe during the Nineteenth Century,' by Professor J. Westlake, LL.D., in *Lectures on the History of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by F. A. Kirkpatrick, Cambridge, 1904, p. 33.

often been taken as their model of freedom ; but for all that her government was in no real sense representative, and it was only with the Revolution that the demand for representative government struck root. To the French mind, at death-grips with an absolute despotism, such a government naturally took the form of a Republic. But the name is superficial, and has often obscured the true issue.<sup>1</sup> The real point lies in the extent of the control exercised by the people over their own concerns ; and what Tennyson has justly called ' our crowned republic ' may answer to the ideal more fully than a nominal republic in the hands of a powerful clique. Now the history of Europe since 1815 is, in fact, the history of the struggle after the attainment of this double ideal of internal and external liberty. Wordsworth, as we have seen, realized the importance of both. In his championship of the cause of Spain he learnt that a true patriotism does not pursue selfish ambition at the cost of other nations, but rather implies a sympathy with all their legitimate aspirations. He learnt also, though in his later years he tended to lose his grasp of it, the significance of internal liberty. For internal liberty is not wholly comprised in parliamentary representation—that is only one means to the end : it raises at once all those social problems which exercised the attention of the last century, and will exercise us for the years to come. The words of Coleridge, in *The Friend*, expressive of Wordsworth's conviction no less than his own, sum up for us the whole social problem : ' Those institutions of society which should condemn me to the necessity of twelve hours' daily toil, would make my soul a slave, and sink the

<sup>1</sup> As e.g. to Mazzini, and at times to our own poets, Landor and Swinburne.



rational being in the mere animal. It is a mockery of our fellow-creatures' wrongs to call them equal in rights, when, by the bitter compulsion of their wants, we make them inferior to us in all that can soften the heart or dignify the understanding.'<sup>1</sup>

It is our task to-day to see how far these two related conceptions of liberty, each of them essential to an intelligent patriotism, each of them, if fully understood, presupposing the other, have inspired the poets of the last century.

The years which followed Waterloo were a bitter disappointment to the true patriot, for they showed clearly enough how little those in authority appreciated the significance of the struggle against Napoleon. The conclusion of peace, instead of proving the beginnings of a new age of reasoned liberty, was the signal for a strenuous reaction against both aspects of freedom. The Holy Alliance concluded between the sovereigns of Russia, Prussia, and Austria, followed by the Quadruple Alliance, to which Great Britain also was a party, set itself to thwart the progress of liberal opinions throughout Europe, and to curb, in the interest of the ruling sovereigns, any nationalist aspirations on the part of the people, or any desire to have a voice in their own concerns. At the same time, in every country, poverty and want ran riot, and were regarded with cynical indifference. Though it may be that other countries suffered even worse than England, in England the case was desperate enough. The national resources had been drained by the war. The labour market had not adjusted itself to the increasing substitution of machinery for hand labour; the selfish legislation of the landowners kept the price of bread high. Riots of

<sup>1</sup> *The Friend*, Section i, Essay xvi.



starving men were repressed with ruthless severity, and any attempts at freedom of speech were visited with condign punishment. Freedom of thought in matters religious was regarded with the same hatred as liberalism of politics; and orthodox Christianity, not for the first time nor the last, went hand in glove with reaction and political tyranny.

It was in such a world that Byron and Shelley rose to manhood. Byron understood, as did few of his time, the historical significance of the Revolution, and whilst he perceived the causes that led to its collapse, he saw even in its failures the dawn of another era :

Yet Freedom yet thy banner torn but flying  
Streams like the thundercloud *against* the wind;

the seed was sown, and he could trust to a better soil and better conditions to bring forth its fruit in due season. Into the cause of oppressed peoples, struggling for independence, he flung himself with a noble ardour. 'A free Italy' seemed to him the 'very poetry of politics'; and when this failed him he turned to Greece, and gave to Greece not only the noblest of his song, but his life. On the rulers of his own land, who had helped to turn a war against the tyranny of Napoleon into an opportunity for reviving the thraldom of pre-revolutionary days, he poured the vials of his burning scorn. To Wellington he wrote, harshly perhaps, but not without some truth :

Never had mortal man such opportunity,  
Except Napoleon, or abused it more :  
You might have freed fallen Europe from the unity  
Of tyrants, and been blest from shore to shore :  
And now what is your fame ? Shall the Muse tune it ye ?  
Now that the rabble's first vain shouts are o'er ?  
Go ! hear it in your famished country's cries !  
Behold the world ! and curse your victories !<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Don Juan*, ix. 9.

With a like withering sarcasm he exposed the selfish oppression of the English landowner, who had seen in the war a chance of making money out of corn land, and bitterly complained because the peace had dropped the price of their rents :

The landed interest—(you may understand  
The phrase much better, leaving out the land)  
The land self-interest groans from shore to shore,  
For fear that plenty should attain the poor.  
Up, up again, ye rents ! exalt your notes,  
Or else the ministry will lose their votes.

Year after year they voted cent. per cent.,  
Blood, sweat, and tear-wrung millions—why ? for rent !  
They roar'd, they dined, they drank, they swore they  
meant  
To die for England—why then live ? for rent !  
The peace has made one general malcontent  
Of these high-market patriots ; war was rent !  
Their love of country, millions all misspent,  
How reconcile ? by reconciling rent !  
Their good, ill, health, wealth, joy, or discontent,  
Being, end, aim, religion—rent, rent, rent !<sup>1</sup>

To both aspects of the problem Shelley devoted his beautiful idealistic nature. It is true that for the dim future he had the vision of a world that should be

equal, unclassed, tribeless and nationless,  
in which all men should be knit together only by bonds of love and mutual service ; and it is a common error to suppose that he had no grip of present conditions. But he knew well enough that the practical steps towards the attainment of that human perfectibility after which he yearned were through the internal and external liberty of the state. Absorption in the ideal no more prevented his understanding the immediate needs of reform than

<sup>1</sup> *The Age of Bronze*, 598-631.

it stayed him from personal devotion to any suffering that crossed his path. In the same year as he wrote *Prometheus Unbound*, the revolution in Spain inspired his sublime *Ode to Liberty*; and in the *Ode to Naples* and *Hellas* he celebrated the kindred struggles of Italy and Greece. And he who could truly speak of himself as

a nerve o'er which do creep  
The else unfelt oppressions of the earth

had a sympathy, far more poignant than Byron's, with the miseries of the poor. 'He loved the people,' says Mrs. Shelley, 'and respected them as often more virtuous, and as always more suffering, and therefore more deserving of sympathy, than the great. He believed that a clash between the two classes of society was inevitable, and he eagerly ranged himself on the people's side.'<sup>1</sup> When the news reached him of that climax in the policy of repression known as 'Peterloo' his indignation was unbounded; and he planned a series of poems to commemorate the wrongs of the people and to encourage them in their struggle for freedom, though urging them at the same time to eschew violence and any harbouring of revenge.

In this spirit he writes a new version of the national anthem, addressed to Liberty:

Whom Britons own to be  
Immortal queen!  
She is thine own pure soul  
Moulding the mighty whole,—  
God save the queen!  
She is thine own deep love  
Rained down from heaven above,—  
Where'er she rest or move,  
God save our queen!

He writes a sonnet depicting the woes of England in

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Shelley, note to *Poems of 1819*.

vivid colours, yet believing that as though from the grave the spirit of Liberty would rise again. And in the *Mask of Anarchy*, wherein Castlereagh, Sidmouth, and Eldon are pilloried as cruelty, cunning, and hypocrisy, he exposes the pitiable dependence of unorganized labour upon selfish and irresponsible capital, pointing out that the worst of this slavery is not the bodily ills that it suffers, but the state of mind which it produces :

'Tis to be a slave in soul,  
And to hold no strong control  
Over your own wills, but be  
All that others make of ye.

Freedom, he contends, lies not in luxury or the power to do what we like with others, it lies in a decent sufficiency supported by a justice which shields alike the high and the low, and allows full development for the body and mind of every citizen ; and in a wisdom which allows the mind to work out its own salvation unhampered by priestcraft. Such Freedom indeed is Peace ; it is Love ready to sacrifice all personal interests for the common good. Its lamps are Science, Poetry, and Thought, and its exceeding loveliness is expressed not in words but in deeds. The true patriot, urged Shelley in his pamphlet on Reform, is the man who recognizes it as his duty to enlighten and unite the nation, to promulgate political truth, to promote the open confederation of friends of liberty, and at the same time to discourage the use in political controversy of either secrecy or violence. The teaching of Shelley, disregarded as it was, and often even to-day spoken of as the vague idealism of an unpractical visionary, remains a vital force in the cause of human progress.

Byron and Shelley were regarded by the orthodox

opinion of their day as rebels rather than as patriots. But in times of reaction, when a country repudiates those principles on which its fair fame must always rest, rebellion is the only form that patriotism can take ; and time has justified them both. It is they who in the darkest hour for English liberty kept alive the ideal ; and if the blindness of insular prejudice withheld from them their due meed of honour, their width of outlook and their sympathy with struggling national aspiration has won for them a name throughout Europe, rivalled by Shakespeare alone. Their death left our song without a voice of authentic ring, for the vitality of Wordsworth had been spent during the very progress of the Napoleonic wars. Yet the cause of freedom was not without a rough but earnest singer. The agonies and the hopes of a starving and down-trodden people were articulate in the rhymes of Ebenezer Elliott,<sup>1</sup> who depicted in bold but vivid colours the result of ultra-taxation, bread monopoly, and what he calls ' their inevitable result—the beautiful battle of ten dogs for one bone '. In championing the cause of democracy Elliott was right in holding that he was championing the cause of the nation. ' Nations ', he said, ' are a fate to themselves, they make what they call their destiny, be it for good or evil ', and that destiny can only be good if the life of the masses is sound and allows of their physical and moral development. Hence it follows that his great *People's Anthem* :

When wilt thou save the people ?  
Oh, God of mercy, when ?  
Not kings and lords, but nations !  
Not thrones and crowns, but men !

<sup>1</sup> *The Polish Fugitives* and *A Song in Exile* show that Elliott's passion for freedom was not confined to his own country.

Flowers of thy heart, O God, are they !  
Let them not pass like weeds, away !  
Their heritage a sunless day,  
God save the People !

is not a cry of faction ; it is the fervent prayer of a true patriot.

But the salvation of the people is a slow process, and mere political change affects very little. The Reform Bill of 1832, from which so much was hoped, left the masses still unrepresented. It placed greater power in the hands of a class just above the labourer, and hardly more sympathetic with him than the landowner ; it did little to hasten the millennium. It was his anticipation of this that had made Wordsworth oppose the Reform Bill, though he confessed that he had much of the spirit of the Chartist in him. For this newly enfranchised class had just that narrow sympathy and that belief in commercial prosperity as the *summum bonum*, which had always seemed to him our gravest national peril. It is significant, at least, that such improvements as were effected during these dark years, e. g. in the Factory Acts, were carried by the pressure of public opinion against the official leaders of party politics. And that public opinion was stimulated by contemporary verse. Mrs. Browning's *Cry of the Children*, in particular, did much to awaken the public conscience to the iniquities of child labour. Hood's *Song of the Shirt*, and Charles Kingsley's *Rough Rhyme on a Rough Matter* (the harshness of the game laws and the disgraceful housing of the country labourer) exposed social evils which were in different ways sapping the vital energies of the country. None of this is great poetry, it is too obviously occasional, and didactic in its tone ; but the poet, like other



men, is a citizen, and he is ready to sacrifice the best he has—his art itself, if need be—to the service of his country. To develop in detail the attitude of poetry towards this struggle for internal liberty would take me beyond my present intention; but it is obviously no unimportant aspect of my theme, and in all truly national poetry it is bound to be recurrent. In the thirties and forties of the last century the social problem was clearly the gravest national concern, and if we do not regard it now in the light of a crisis, it is only because in some form or another it is continually before us. And to cope with it is needed not merely the practical acumen of the statesman, but the imaginative understanding and sympathy of the poet.

The middle years of the nineteenth century are to most English readers represented by the work of Tennyson, and no poet was ever more essentially the creature of his time than he. To many he has appeared as the very ideal of a patriotic poet, and indeed, he had in full measure certain of the essential qualifications. He had a deep love of his native land based on a reverence for all that was great in her history, and he delighted to celebrate those of her heroes, past and present, whose lives expressed his ideal of courage, temperance, and an unswerving devotion to the call of duty. And magnificently did he celebrate them. His ballad on *The Revenge* is, I think, the finest ballad of heroic action in our language. His *Charges of the Light and Heavy Brigades* and his *Defence of Lucknow* are difficult to match among our martial songs. Tennyson believed, and rightly, that

The song that nerves a nation's heart  
Is in itself a deed,

and he wrote in the spirit of his faith. Greatest of all



his patriotic poems is the *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*. In its noblest passage he imagines the meeting of Nelson with the Iron Duke, 'great by land as thou by sea,' and draws from their example that precept that is entirely characteristic of him :

Yea, let all things good await  
Him who cares not to be great  
But as he saves or serves the State.  
Not once or twice in our rough island story  
The path of duty was the way to glory :  
He that walks it, only thirsting  
For the light, and learns to deaden  
Love of self, before the journey closes,  
He shall find the stubborn thistle bursting  
Into glossy purples, which outredde  
All voluptuous garden-roses.

Such is Tennyson's ideal. And there is another point on which he has earned our gratitude. He was the first of our poets to realize the abiding value to our country of her dependencies beyond the seas. 'How strange', he wrote, 'that England cannot see her true policy lies in a closer union with her colonies !' At a time when not a few Englishmen were tending to regard them as an expensive luxury rather than a source of strength, Tennyson spoke out his bold words of protest :

We lately heard,  
A strain to shame us, keep you to yourselves  
So loyal is too costly ! friends, your love  
Is but a burthen : loose the bond, and go.  
Is this the tone of empire, here the faith  
That made us rulers, this indeed the voice  
And meaning, whom the roar of Hougemont  
Left mightiest of all peoples under heaven ?  
. . . . .

The loyal to their crown  
Are loyal to their own far sons, who love  
Our ocean empire with her boundless homes

For ever-broadening England, and her throne  
In our vast Orient, and one isle, one isle,  
That knows not her own greatness ; if she knows,  
And dreads it, we are fallen.<sup>1</sup>

It is easy enough to sing the praises of Canada and Australia to-day. It is sometimes forgotten that long before the days of Kipling, Tennyson, with a dignity that befits his theme, had sounded the true imperial note.

This is a noble patriotism, and it finds in Tennyson an expression always elevated, and often highly poetic. But one is bound to admit that as a whole his grasp of the present was not equal to his devotion to the past. In his attitude to that fuller conception of patriotism which is related to ideals of liberty and progress, which regards as its intimate concern the good of all classes in the community, and extends an active sympathy to the welfare of other states, Tennyson is found, as in his attitude to wider problems of life and thought, to represent many of the limitations and the prejudices of orthodox mid-Victorianism. At home he never faced the social issues of his time. He wrote much of freedom, but the little enthusiasm which he truly felt for it in his youth was soon sobered into doubts and fears. He contemplated it with satisfaction 'slowly broadening down from precedent to precedent': he had no sympathy with those who tried to force the pace—to gain for all the independence that he enjoyed himself. The freedom that he extols is the freedom of a comfortable middle class. She is 'sober-suited', and can be trusted not to soil her clothes. He had no real love of the people, and no sympathy with the modern movement towards democracy. 'Whoever degrades another, degrades me. By

<sup>1</sup> *To the Queen : Epilogue to the Idylls of the King.*

God ! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms.' <sup>1</sup> That is a sentiment that never stirred his soul. He never realized that the recognition of one's own individuality presupposes the recognition of the individuality of others, that freedom loses its meaning unless it is regarded as the inalienable right of every human being. He knew that democracy was the creed of the future, and he dimly recognized its justice, but he did not understand it—and he was afraid. He is the veritable Balaam of progress. His hymns to Liberty are solemn warnings against the dangers of 'raw Haste, half-sister to Delay', and of 'the falsehood of extremes'. What he urges is true enough. Milton saw as clearly as Tennyson the necessary association of freedom with discipline and with knowledge. But he saw also that nothing could be gained without some sacrifice, and that your devotion to a cause is partly tested by your readiness to run some risk for its sake. But Tennyson will take no risk. His advocacy of law and precedent has just that half-truth which has given plausibility to all the obstruction of all the ages.

Hence follows a certain superficiality, and a hesitancy in his attitude to all the social problems that confront him. He rings the bells of his village church on the passing of the Reform Bill, and lives in constant dread of a revolution. He admits the great social wrongs of his time, and is consoled by the evolutionary reflection that we are 'still in the go-cart', and that 'there is time for the race to grow'. In the meantime he views with satisfaction the sacrifice of those 'great sirs' who

Give up their parks some dozen times a year  
To let the people breathe ; <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*, § 24.

<sup>2</sup> Epilogue to *The Princess*.

but when the people show ugly signs of wishing to breathe more than a dozen times a year, he is disquieted; and in their passionate and often unruly clamours for justice he sees little but the mob fury of a people misled by demagogues. He realized indeed the dangers of a growing materialism, and was disturbed by the self-centred, complacent narrowness of the middle class. But the only means that he can suggest by which they should learn to 'feel with their native land and be one with their kind' is war, lacking the imagination to conceive of other avenues for heroic service to country, and ignoring the fact that war, however just and necessary it may be, only increases the social wrongs and heaps sufferings on the shoulders of those who least are able to bear them. In all this Tennyson was too much of the spokesman of his age, too little of a seer. He had not the faith nor the generous enthusiasm that makes the prophet.

Love thou thy land, with love far-brought  
From out the storied past, and used  
Within the present, but transfused  
Thro' future time by power of thought.

This is nobly said, and it is the ideal of every intelligent patriot. But the thought to transfuse it was just what Tennyson lacked. 'The truth is', said Matthew Arnold, 'that Tennyson, with all his artistic skill, is deficient in intellectual power.' He lacked ideas. And further, he, no more than the average Englishman of his day, attempted to enrich his understanding by a sympathetic study of the civilization and ideals of other nations. It is true that as a young man he expressed sympathy with both Spain and Poland, and that his hatred of Russia for her ill-treatment of Poland and Hungary stimulated his eagerness, years later, for the Crimean War. But his

patriotism was essentially insular. His love for his own country went hand in hand with an ignorance of others, even a contempt of them. His attitude to France, in particular, was as unintelligent as that of the most typical mid-Victorian. He never admitted the immense debt of the whole civilized world to the genius of France, to her lucidity of mind, her generous impulses, her idealism, to the sacrifices that she had made for the cause of freedom :

O she that made the brave appeal  
For manhood when our time was dark,  
And from our fetters drove the spark  
Which was as lightning to reveal  
New seasons, with the swifter play  
Of pulses, and benigner day;  
She that divinely shook the dead  
From living man ; that stretched ahead  
Her resolute forefinger straight,  
And marched towards the gloomy gate  
Of earth's Untried, gave note, and in  
The good name of Humanity  
Called forth the daring vision !<sup>1</sup>

A memory of these things won from George Meredith this sublime tribute to France in the hour of her deepest humiliation ; and England, as 'the ancient home of Liberty', should have been the readiest of all nations to pay her grateful homage. One of the brightest aspects of our present situation is that now, though late, England is learning something of the true nobility of France. But Tennyson never learnt it : he could only sneer at her errors and exaggerate those weaknesses that are the defect of her virtues. His attitude to foreign nations never showed real insight. Consequently, though he loved peace, he did not ensure it. In his *Golden Year*,

<sup>1</sup> George Meredith, *FRANCE*, December 1870.

indeed, he fell a victim to the comfortable fallacy, so popular in the last century, that the world could be bound together in brotherhood by the golden links of trade, ignorant of the unquestionable fact that commercial rivalry and ambition is the most fruitful source of hatred and of war; but for the most part he was content to look forward to that distant future when the war-drum should throb no longer, and there should be 'a Parliament of man, the Federation of the world'. Yet that loving understanding of other races, by which alone such an end may be furthered, Tennyson strove neither to gain nor to promote.

For those who felt deeply the claims of nationality, the most inspiring event in the nineteenth century, perhaps in the history of the world, was the heroic struggle of Italy for national unity and independence. Tennyson, like all Englishmen, sympathized with the Italians, but it is significant that Italy never inspired his verse. We are forced to notice the difference between his patriotism and that of Italy's inspired prophet Mazzini. 'Nationality is sacred to me,' said Mazzini, 'because I see in it the instrument of labour for the good and progress of all men.'<sup>1</sup> Mazzini based his love of country on the faith that the claims of humanity come first, and that a country is false to itself if it does not keep in view the good of all mankind. If it finds its strength in the weakness of another, if it is indifferent to the cause of struggling nations, it has no right to exist as a nation. 'National life and international life should be the two manifestations of the same principle, the love of good.'

It is because we to-day, like Wordsworth during the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Life of Mazzini*, by Bolton King (1912), p. 297, and the whole of chap. vii (pp. 296-313).



Peninsular Wars, have gained an insight into the fact that our material and spiritual welfare is bound up with the destiny of others, that we turn most gratefully to the poets who entered with their whole hearts into the struggles for national freedom which mark the European history of the last century, and who, by their sympathy with other lands, lent a fuller significance to their love of home. To Landor, Clough, Rossetti, the two Brownings, Swinburne, Meredith, Italy became as it were a symbol of the noblest conception of patriotism. From the seemingly fruitless struggles of the forties, which ended for Italy in crushing defeat, Clough learnt that in a noble cause

'Tis better to have fought and lost  
Than never to have fought at all.<sup>1</sup>

It was Browning's pride that his study of an Italian patriot was read aloud by Mazzini to his brother exiles in England, to show them how fully an Englishman could enter into their cause; and his brilliant gallery of portraits drawn from different nationalities, helped, like Landor's noble *Conversations*, to widen popular interest and dispel insular prejudice. Mrs. Browning, in what is, perhaps, her most lovely poem, *The Court Lady*, has expressed in two lines the kernel of Mazzini's creed.

Happy are all free nations, too strong to be dispossessed,  
But blessed are they among nations, that dare to be  
strong for the rest.

And in defence of her Italian poems she wrote a preface still further developing the same idea. 'If patriotism', she says, 'means the flattery of one's own nation in every

<sup>1</sup> PESCHIERA, *Alteram Partem*. Clough's well-known lines, *Say not, the struggle nought availeth*, were inspired by the same aspect of the Italian struggle.

case, then the patriot is merely the courtier. . . . Nationality is excellent in its place, and the instinct of self-love is the root of a man, which will develop into sacrificial virtues. But all the virtues are means and uses ; and, if we hinder their tendency to growth and expansion, we both destroy them as virtues, and degrade them to the rankest species of corruption reserved for the most noble organizations. For instance, non-intervention in the affairs of neighbouring states is a high political virtue ; but non-interference does not mean passing by on the other side when your neighbour falls among thieves. . . . If patriotism be a virtue indeed, it cannot mean an exclusive devotion to our country's interests, for that is only another form of devotion to personal interests, family interests, or provincial interests, all of which, if not driven past themselves, are vulgar and immoral objects. Let us put away the Little Peddlingtonism unworthy of a great nation, and too prevalent among us. If the man who does not look beyond this natural life is of a somewhat narrow order, what must be the man who does not look beyond his own frontier or his own sea ? . . . The praise of a nation should not explode from within, from loud civic mouths, but come from without, as all worthy praise must, from the alliances she has fostered and the populations she has saved.'<sup>1</sup>

But of all our singers Swinburne was stirred by Italy to noblest poetic utterance, and entered most fully alike into her sufferings and into the exultation of her triumph. His *Songs before Sunrise*, which form the most lovely and most impassioned collection of Hymns to Liberty in our language, have Italy as their main inspiring theme ; for the cause of Italy is in his eyes the cause of progress for the world ; and in those who give their lives for her he

<sup>1</sup> Preface to *Poems before Congress*, 1860.

reads the fate and the fame of those who in all climes and  
ages have answered the call of heroic duty :

By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept,  
    Remembering thee,  
That for ages of agony hast endured, and slept,  
    And wouldst not see.  
By the waters of Babylon we stood up and sang,  
    Considering thee,  
That a blast of deliverance in the darkness rang,  
    To set thee free.  
And with trumpets and thunderings and with morning  
    song  
    Came up the light ;  
And thy spirit uplifted thee to forget thy wrong  
    As day doth night.  
And thy sons were dejected not any more, as then  
    When thou wert shamed ;  
When thy lovers went heavily without heart, as men  
    Whose life was maimed.  
In the desolate distances, with a great desire,  
    For thy love's sake,  
With our hearts going back to thee, they were filled with  
    fire,  
    Were nigh to break.

. . . . .

Unto each man his handiwork, unto each his crown,  
    The just fate gives ;  
Whoso takes the world's life on him and his own lays  
    down,  
    He, dying so, lives.  
Whoso bears the whole heaviness of the wrong'd world's  
    weight  
    And puts it by,  
It is well with him suffering, though he face man's fate ;  
    How should he die ?  
Seeing death has no part in him any more, no power  
    Upon his head ;  
He has bought his eternity with a little hour,  
    And is not dead.  
For an hour if ye look for him, he is no more found,  
    For one hour's space ;

Then ye lift up your eyes to him and behold him crowned,  
A deathless face.  
On the mountains of memory, by the world's well-springs,  
In all men's eyes,  
Where the light of the life of him is on all past things,  
Death only dies.<sup>1</sup>

It can, of course, be argued that this love of other countries only weakens your adherence to your own, that its issue is not patriotism but cosmopolitanism. Patriotism, it has been urged, is essentially selfish, and nothing but a weak sentimentalism could never represent it as otherwise. It is the doctrine of the survival of the fittest, coupled with the faith that you are the fittest to survive, and that for the sake of your development others must be maimed and destroyed. But this crude misapplication of Darwinism is just the theory of the state against which we are fighting to-day, and its value as political theory is no higher than its poetic utterances, in what are called hymns of hate. If all that is noblest in human nature did not revolt against such theory the example of our poets might help us to repudiate it. If you are sympathetic with other nations it does not for a moment follow that you are less loyal to your own. It simply means that you have widened your outlook, as love only can widen it, and that you are able to detect with keener eye the faults in your own country, and set yourself to correct them. If Browning wrote

Open my heart, and you will see  
Graven inside of it 'Italy',

we remember also the touching simplicity of his

Here and here did England help me, how can I help  
England?

<sup>1</sup> Swinburne, *Songs before Sunrise*, 'Super flumina Babylonis' (*Poems*, ii. 34).

If Swinburne could exult in the Italian triumph of his goddess Liberty it was from England he had learned to worship her, and assuredly no poet has praised England more often, or in more glowing words than he :

Where the footfall sounds of England, where the smile  
of England shines,  
Rings the tread and laughs the face of freedom, fair as hope  
divines  
Days to be, more brave than ours and lit by lordlier stars  
for signs.

All our past proclaims our future : Shakespeare's voice  
and Nelson's hand,  
Milton's faith and Wordsworth's trust in this our chosen  
and chainless land,  
Bear us witness : come the world against her, England  
yet shall stand.

Earth and sea bear England witness if he lied who said  
it ; he  
Whom the winds that ward her, waves that clasp, and  
herb and flower and tree  
Fed with English dews and sunbeams, hail as more than  
man may be.

No man ever spake as he that bade our England be but  
true,  
Keep but faith with England fast and firm, and none  
should bid her rue ;  
None may speak as he : but all may know the sign that  
Shakespeare knew.<sup>1</sup>

Thus to Swinburne, as to most of our poets, love of England is bound up with that love of freedom on which her claim to greatness is based. In this he is the true child of Milton, of Wordsworth, of Shelley ; and his conception of liberty embraces all its forms, national independence, the freedom of the individual mind to work out its own salvation, and the freedom from slavery to

<sup>1</sup> Swinburne, ' England : An Ode ', *Poems*, vi. 186.

such social conditions as stunt and maim all spiritual growth. Yet he is conscious enough that through indolence and lethargy we are too ready to endanger that freedom that we possess, and still more that through selfishness and a lack of imagination we are blind to the significance of our creed in its application to other nations and to our own oppressed people. In *A Watch in the Night* he depicts England's ignoble apathy to the cause of which she boasts herself the champion :

England, what of the night?  
Night is for slumber and sleep,  
Warm, no season to weep.  
Let me alone till the day.  
Sleep would I still if I might,  
Who have slept for two hundred years.  
Once had I honour, they say,  
But slumber is sweeter than tears.

Elsewhere he represents Liberty as standing by the couch where England slumbers, content with the internal freedom she has already secured, and turning a deaf ear to the cries of her own enslaved poor. In words of bitter reproach Liberty warns the sleeper of the inevitable sequel to her indifference :

No brave shame then redeems  
Thy lusts of sloth and thy fears?  
Thy poor lie slain of thy hands,  
Their starved limbs rot in thy sight :  
As a shadow the ghost of thee stands,  
Among men living, and lands,  
And stirs, not leftward or right.  
Freeman he is not, but slave  
Who stands not out on my side ;  
His own hand hollows his grave,  
Nor strength is in me to save  
Where strength is none to abide.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Swinburne, *Poems*, ii. 218, 'Perinde ac Cadaver.'



And in his *Marching Song* for those who strive to bring about a better and happier world he makes to his countrymen this further appeal :

O people, O perfect nation,  
O England that shall be,  
How long till thou take station ?  
How long till thralls live free ?  
How long till all thy soul be one with all thy sea ? <sup>1</sup>

But the main burthen of his song for England is one of pride in her past and of faith that she will be true to her destiny.

For us the sun, not wholly risen  
Nor equal now for all, illumines  
With more of light than cloud that looms :  
Of light that leads forth souls from prison  
And breaks the seals of tombs.

And it is by this pride in her past that he would awaken her to be true to herself.

The morning comes not, yet the night  
Wanes, and men's eyes win strength to see  
Where twilight is, where light shall be  
When conquered wrong and conquering right  
Acclaim a world set free. <sup>2</sup>

If Swinburne represents the enthusiasm of the modern patriotism, George Meredith represents its brain. Optimist as he is, there is nothing vague or sentimental about him, his business is to grapple with hard facts. His national teaching is but an extension of his deep study of nature and human life, and is based on what he has learnt from a close communion with mother earth. Earth, he says, is the only reality we have the means of knowing ; if we keep close to earth we are at

<sup>1</sup> Swinburne : *Poems*, ii. 157.

<sup>2</sup> Ib. iii. 174, ' The Commonweal ', 1887.

least in touch with the actual. The spirit of evolution in nature works through struggle and through energy : man, a child of nature, can only achieve by the same means. But in so far as he has intellect his energy must be of the head as well as of the muscles, it must be directed by mind, or he falls behind in the race ; in so far as he is a social animal, his energy must work through fellowship and brotherhood. The life of the senses keeps man apart from his fellows, imprisoned within himself : by force of intellect he unites to work for the common good. The dangers of civilization are that they tend to draw man away from reading the facts of earth, and in a measure seem to protect him from them, and so to breed illusory beliefs and a false reading of human conditions ; wealth, in particular, and ease blind him to the struggle in which he must bear his part, for his own sake no less than for his fellows ; and they may easily undermine the force or warp the direction of his energy. Intellect alone can save him and save the race.

Those warriors of the sighting brain  
 Give worn Humanity new youth.  
 Our song and star are they to lead  
 The tidal multitude and blind  
 From bestial to the higher breed  
 By fighting souls of love divined.  
 They scorned the ventral dream of peace  
 Unknown in nature. This they knew :  
 That life begets with fair increase  
 Beyond the flesh, if life be true.<sup>1</sup>

But this 'sighting brain' must not be of the few ; it is potential in all, and only by freedom and independence can it be developed in them :

May brain democratic be king of the host.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Meredith, *The Thrush in February*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Empty Purse*.

Meredith realizes as keenly as did Tennyson the dangers of power placed in the hands of those as yet untrained to it—‘the concrete indifferent, he calls them, faithless, mean, encased in matter, contemptuous of the impalpable’,<sup>1</sup> yet he realizes too, that Greece and Rome fell, as all structures must, because they were built on too narrow a foundation; and it is the patriot’s task in the present not vainly to attempt to crush the irresistible life-force of the people, with whom lies the destiny of the race, still less to be afraid of it: but to prepare the soil for them, guided in our service to the present by the needs of the future rather than by the traditions of the past. It is a work that needs love, but love guided by the untiring energy of brain.

And this same brain is needed to direct our attitude to other nations. No poet ever loved England better than Meredith or had a deeper insight into her faults, for he had seen her from without as well as from within. Educated in Germany, a correspondent in Italy during the latter years of her heroic struggle,<sup>2</sup> married to a French woman, and all his life long a passionate but clear-sighted lover of the genius of France, ‘Mother of Reason, inveterate of brain’, he was free from any taint of insularity. ‘The world’, he said, ‘is being visibly universalized. To deny us this larger citizenship is the merest provinciality.’ And here he saw England’s weakness as foreign nations have seen it, though with the eyes of a loyal son rather than a jealous neighbour. England, he knew, was honest, was brave, had a real love of liberty,

<sup>1</sup> *Foresight and Patience*. Meredith’s writings are so full of national and political wisdom that this rapid summary of his position is hopelessly inadequate.

<sup>2</sup> For Meredith’s sympathy with Italy see especially his novel *Vittoria*.

was of all nations the most generous. Her danger lay in intellectual sloth; she forgot the lesson of mother earth, the need for strenuous endeavour; she was complacent, slow to learn from others, allowing her strength to decline with the increase of her wealth, too ready to trust to chance for her protection, where she should rely upon energy to keep her strong and brain to keep her efficient. In his last years he made repeated appeals to her to face the facts. In particular we may note his attitude to national defence. He saw in war, as all sane men see in it, a reversion to the primitive and the brutal; but, he urges, it is merely unintelligent to blind our eyes to the fact that the instincts which incite men to war are still alive and potent:

Our cry for cradled Peace, while men are still  
 The three parts brute that smothers the divine,  
 Heaven answers: Guard it with forethoughtful will  
 Or buy it, all your gains from war resign.<sup>1</sup>

If we are to keep our heritage, he urges, we must be 'belted athletes'; to be weak is to be false to ourselves and to our friends, and to offer to our foes an insidious temptation. The poem entitled *The Call*, written in 1908, only a year or two before his death, reads like an anticipation of the present crisis:

Has ever weakness won esteem?  
 Or counts it as a prized ally?  
 They who have read in History deem  
 It ranks among the slavish fry  
 Whose claim to live Justiciary Fates deny.

Dreading [our foe], we do him wrong;  
 For fears discolour, fears invite.  
 Like him, our task is to be strong;  
 Unlike him claiming not by might  
 To snatch an envied treasure as a right.

<sup>1</sup> *Il y a cent ans.*

This Britain slumbering she is rich,  
Lies placid like a cradled child,  
At times with an uneasy twitch,  
That tells of dreams unduly wild,  
Shall she be with a foreign drug defiled ?

The grandeur of her deeds recall ;  
Look on her face so kindly fair ;  
This Britain ! and were she to fall,  
Mankind would breathe a harsher air,  
The nations miss a light of leading rare.

‘ This Britain ’, if she is to fulfil her destiny, must be strong, but she must learn to guide her strength by intellect, and to base it upon the simple virtues. The words which Meredith spoke to France in 1870 he would reiterate to his own dear country to-day :

Lo ! strength is of the plain root-virtues born.  
Strength shall ye gain by service, prove in scorn,  
Train by endurance, by devotion shape.  
Strength is not won by miracle or rape.  
It is the offspring of the modest years,  
The gift of sire to son, through those firm laws  
Which we name Gods : which are the righteous cause,  
The cause of man and manhood’s ministers.

Thus during the last century did our poets pass on the torch which they received at the hands of Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth, and shed their light upon those twofold aspects of freedom with which the safety and honour of our country is inseparably linked. At no time in our history could their inspiration be of more value to us than to-day. We need to keep our ideals high, our courage undaunted. And with the end of the war the crisis is not over ; it only enters upon a new phase. Our knowledge of human nature alike in the past and in the present is enough to suggest to us something of the dangers that lie ahead. We have only

to recall the prophetic warnings of Milton, which he himself lived to see fulfilled, or to remember the bitter reaction that followed Waterloo. He is indeed short-sighted who cannot foresee that those problems of internal liberty, which are as vital to our national existence as our honourable relations with other states, will once more become acute.

At such a time we shall do well to live in the companionship of the poets. I do not suggest that we should look to them for a practical solution of the troubles that confront us—that would be to mistake their function, but we can only avert disaster by meeting the future in the spirit of the poet.

‘There is’, says Shelley, ‘no want of knowledge respecting what is wisest and best in morals, government, and political economy, or at least what is wiser than what men now practise and endure. . . . We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know ; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine ; we want the poetry of life. . . . Poetry compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know. . . . Poetry, and the principle of Self, of which money is the visible incarnation, are the God and Mammon of the world.’

And inasmuch as all fruitful human action, guided as it is by reason, has its roots in noble feeling, whence alone it gathers strength, ‘poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world’.

Our complex and troubled modern civilization has not yet, perhaps, in the fullest sense found its poet. William Morris, too late in his career, brought his passion for ideal beauty into touch with his sense of the realities that were about him ; and then, perhaps, too conscious of the



contrast, strove less to reveal the life and soul of the people than to raise the song of battle for their deliverance. Yet those parts, at least, of his *Pilgrims of Hope* which he thought worthy of inclusion among his collected poems, suggest that had he turned sooner to the task he might have proved not so much the Ebenezer Elliott as the Wordsworth of a new spiritual democracy. Viewed simply as art, *Mother and Son* reaches heights unscaled in *The Earthly Paradise*; whilst that lovely lyric which records the *Message of the March Wind* is not the less exquisite a poem because it is a trenchant, even a practical 'criticism of life':

Hark the March wind again of a people is telling  
Of the life that they live there, so haggard and grim,  
That if we and our love amidst them had been dwelling  
My fondness had faltered, thy beauty grown dim.

This land we have loved in our love and our leisure  
For them hangs in heaven, high out of their reach;  
The wide hills o'er the sea-plain for them have no pleasure,  
The grey homes of their fathers no story to teach.

The singers have sung and the builders have builded,  
The painters have fashioned their tales of delight;  
For what and for whom hath the world's book been gilded,  
When all is for these but the blackness of night?

How long, and for what is their patience abiding?  
How oft and how oft shall their story be told?  
While the hope that none seeketh in darkness is hiding,  
And in grief and in sorrow the world groweth old?

We are here at the root of the matter. The strength of a country depends upon the happiness of all her people, on the wealth of their associations with a beautiful past, on the depth of their gratitude for what they owe her, and on their readiness to pay their debt. But no man can be grateful unless he has something to be grateful for,

and no man can be happy unless the conditions of his life are such that he is, in the full sense of the term, free.

There is no need to elaborate further a point which must be obvious to every thoughtful patriot. 'Peace hath her victories no less renown'd than war,' and like the victories of war, they are not won without a sacrifice. Shall we, when the present struggle is over, sink back into lethargy and indifference, satisfied that we have done all that England has a right to expect of us? or shall we rather accept as a creed by which to live, in peace as in war, that higher faith which inspired the patriots of renascent Italy?

Our life is but a little holding, lent  
To do a mighty labour: we are one  
With heaven and the stars when it is spent  
To serve God's aim: else die we with the sun.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Meredith, *Vittoria*, chap. xxi.

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